



Winter/Spring 2026

The Finch Irruption of Winter/ Spring 2026

2025-2026 Species Forecast

According to the Finch Research Network and the Audubon Society, here is what to expect in your birding areas and on your feeders:

Common & Hoary Redpolls: A "probable strong flight" south out of the boreal forest into the Great Lakes, New York, and New England.

Evening Grosbeaks: Predicted moderate to good southward movement; sightings have already been confirmed in New England, New York and Pennsylvania.

Pine Grosbeaks: There should be a small to moderate flight this winter south to the border states. The crop of mountain ash appears below average to poor from Lake Superior across the boreal forest into eastern Quebec. Either side of this area, the crop appears to be above average. Individuals wandering southward will look for European mountain ash berries and small ornamental crabapples even in urban areas. At feeders, they prefer black oil sunflower seeds.

Pine Siskins: Expect a moderate to strong flight south, with many birds having benefited from high nesting survival due to spruce budworm outbreaks. Many have been sighted in New York.

continued on next page



Photograph by Jacqueline Emery
Pine Grosbeak

This is one of those rare, long-yearned-for moments birders dream about every time they look skyward at tall, heavily coned fir trees. If only the finches were coming to town, they muse. This year, wishes do come true: the finches are coming.

Matt Young, co-author of the Stokes Guide to Finches and the Winter Finch Forecast 2025–2026 produced by the Finch Research Network, first predicted an irruptive finch survey in 1999. Young, who wears many hats and has published numerous papers on finches, began birding in upstate New York more than thirty years ago. Birders avidly read his annual finch forecasts, using his predictions of finch movements to plan their winter birding adventures. "Prediction" is the operative word—because with climate change and shifting weather patterns, very little feels predictable anymore. In 2023, Central Park experienced a winter with no Chickadees or Tufted Titmice, a first for many longtime birders. Yet Young has continually refined the reliability of his forecasts by closely observing cone crops on fir and spruce trees in upstate New York and monitoring spruce budworm outbreaks north of the tri-state area. Using these indicators, he produces the anxiously awaited Finch Report each year. Young states, "Finches are like a Christmas tree's present."



Common Redpoll

© Ellen Michaels
www.ellenmichaelsphotos.com



Photograph by Felipe Pimentel

Hoary Redpoll

(No longer a species of their own but have been combined into the Common Redpolls)

Purple Finches: Most Purple Finches will migrate south out of Eastern Canada this winter with some making it as far as southern states.

White-winged Crossbills: Unlike other species, these have mostly swung west toward a healthy spruce crop in Alaska and western Canada, though scattered flocks may appear in the Northeast later in winter.

Red Crossbills: There is a good mixed conifer crop throughout northeastern states including New York. There may be a movement late winter down the coast to Long Island, Cape May, Delaware, and points south, as they sometimes do, when cone crops are depleted as we progress through the winter season.

Red-breasted Nuthatches have been irrupting south since mid-August and continue to irrupt. Individuals have made it as far as the Alabama Gulf Coast. With poor cone crops in the eastern boreal forest, expect this species to continue to move southward.

Past Central Park Finch Sightings

Red & White-winged Crossbills in past irruptive years were observed in the Pinetum and Shakespeare's Garden. They usually travel in small chatty flocks. You might hear their distinct sharp and metallic calls before seeing them—alerting you to their presence.

Common Redpolls, Purple Finch, Red-breasted Nuthatch and Pine Siskin favor the bird feeders in the Ramble and can also be found eating mullein and shriveled up seed bearing plants. Pine Siskins also favor the Sweet Gum seed balls, as well.

Evening Grosbeaks were spotted near the Pool in the North Woods and off the 86th Street Transverse feasting on berried bushes and trees.

Red-breasted Nuthatch and Purple Finch have been sighted in the Pinetum and bird feeders since autumn of 2025.



Photographs by Debbie Becker: Red Crossbills (male & female), Purple Finch (female) and Evening Grosbeaks (male & female).

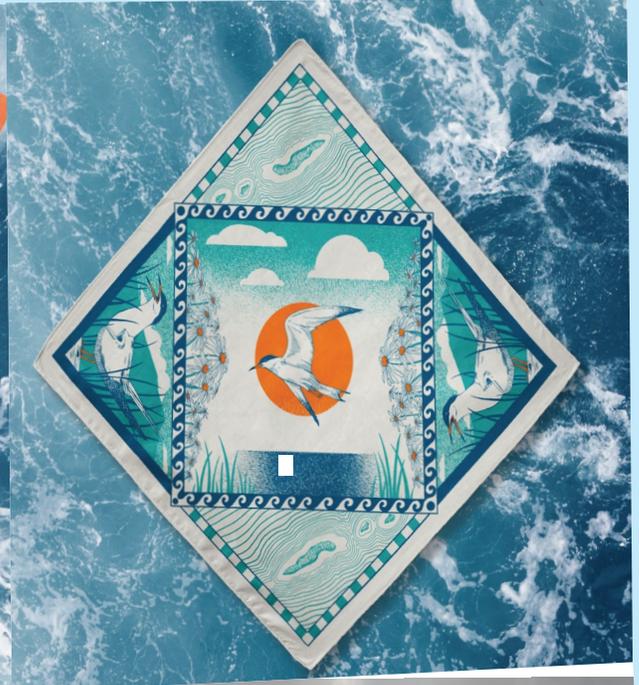
The Bird Collective

A conservation-minded apparel company, has designed a line of shirts and other products that feature images from Great Gull Island. A percentage of Bird Collective's profits will be donated to the Great Gull Island Project to support their ongoing tern research and conservation efforts.

Please check out their offerings at:

birdcollective.com

And purchase some items to support the terns.



Gov. Kathy Hochul signs the Horseshoe Crab Protection Act

Red Knots and the Ecosystem

Horseshoe crabs are among Earth's most ancient inhabitants, with a lineage stretching back more than 450 million years—long before dinosaurs roamed the planet. Yet today, this remarkable species faces alarming population declines driven largely by human exploitation. Harvested for fishing bait and bled for biomedical applications, horseshoe crabs now stand at a critical ecological crossroads. Their decline, however, does not affect them alone. It directly threatens one of North America's most extraordinary migratory shorebirds, the red knot.

Each spring, red knots travel more than 9,000 miles from South America to Arctic breeding grounds, relying on a narrow window of time along the Atlantic coast to refuel. Their survival depends almost entirely on the mass spawning of horseshoe crabs. During this brief period, horseshoe crabs lay millions of nutrient-rich eggs on sandy beaches, providing red knots with the energy needed to complete their journey and reproduce successfully. Without sufficient eggs, red knots cannot gain the weight required for migration, leading to weakened birds, failed breeding seasons, and population collapse. In recent decades, red knot numbers have plummeted, closely mirroring the decline of horseshoe crabs.

This symbiotic relationship underscores how horseshoe crabs serve as a keystone species in coastal ecosystems. While many marine animals benefit from their presence, red knots are uniquely dependent on them. When horseshoe crab populations fall, red knots suffer first and most severely, making their decline a visible warning signal of ecological imbalance.

Despite this critical role, horseshoe crabs have been heavily exploited. They are harvested as bait for eel and conch fisheries and captured by biomedical companies for their blue blood, which contains Limulus Amebocyte Lysate (LAL), used to detect bacterial contamination in medical products. Although labs say that most crabs are released after bleeding, many may not survive the stress. Because horseshoe crabs take about eleven years to reach sexual maturity, even moderate harvesting can devastate population recovery—and with fewer spawning crabs, fewer eggs are available for red knots.

Fortunately, practical alternatives already exist. Invasive green crabs can replace horseshoe crabs as bait, reducing pressure on native populations while helping control another environmental threat. In biomedical testing, synthetic options offer reliable substitutes. Broad adoption of these alternatives would protect horseshoe

crabs and, by extension, the Red Knots that depend on them.

Recognizing the urgency of this crisis, New York enacted the Horseshoe Crab Protection Act in December 2025. Signed into law by Governor Kathy Hochul, the legislation mandates a 25 percent reduction in harvesting over three years and establishes a full ban on commercial and biomedical harvesting by 2029, with limited exceptions for scientific and educational purposes. By passing this law, New York joined neighboring states in prioritizing ecosystem health and migratory bird conservation.

Protecting horseshoe crabs is ultimately about protecting red knots—and the fragile web of life that connects them. The fate of these birds rests on the survival of an ancient marine species whose eggs fuel one of the longest migrations on Earth. As science advances, society has both the means and responsibility to move away from practices that endanger all organisms.



The Peace of Wild Things Wendell Berry

*When despair for the world grows in me
and I wake in the night at the least sound
in fear of what my life and my children's lives may be,
I go and lie down where the wood drake
rests in his beauty on the water, and the great heron feeds.
I come into the peace of wild things
who do not tax their lives with forethought
of grief. I come into the presence of still water.
And I feel above me the day-blind stars
waiting with their light. For a time
I rest in the grace of the world, and am free.*

My Wild Life: Rare-Birds, Close Calls, and Adventures of an Eco-Explorer: A Memoir By Peter Alden (2026)

*Rick Cech is the principal author and photographer of **Butterflies of the East Coast: An Observer's Guide**. He wrote "A Distributional Checklist of the Butterflies and Skippers of the New York City Area," and co-authored the **National Audubon Society Regional Guide to Florida**. (Rick will be leading a **Linnaean field trip on 5/2/26**)*

To be honest, many nature books are relatively generic; anyone with decent penmanship and a little research effort probably could produce them. Not so Peter Alden's recently published "My Wild Life: Rare-Birds, Close Calls, and Adventures of an Eco-Explorer: A Memoir." This is a highly personal Baedeker, (travel guide) bursting with accounts of worldwide experiences that are anything but generic. This is fitting for Peter's memoir, since (as anyone who knows him can readily attest) Peter in real life presents a unique combination of bold, larger-than-life adventurism, set alongside a studied and quite thoughtful approach to recounting his many experiences.

The collision of these two seemingly disparate traits lands with good effect in his new memoir. In it, Peter details his close, lifelong engagement with natural history – from an early childhood fascination in the 1950s, to his pioneering of many new frontiers in ecotourism worldwide (mainly in the 1970s-1980s), to more recent pursuits such as co-founding the first bioblitzes alongside E.O. Wilson.

Along the way, his path has been well-supplied with a stream of memorable personal adventures. Some of these (such as his encounter with former Defense Secretary James Schlesinger in observing the Ross's Gull found in Newburyport, MA in 1971), are legendary in his peer birding community, even though at times he has toned down a few of the more colorful details in print.

During his eco-tourism career, Peter's positioning has always been along the cutting edge. Like a real-world Zelig, he was present in nearly every venue where new developments in field natural history study were taking place, from Central and South America to Africa, Southeast Asia and Antarctica. His experiences illustrate, in personal terms, a generation of evolving natural history tourism that seldom has received such detailed attention,

especially in a discussion this broadly encompassing. It is particularly interesting to learn (or, in some cases, to recall) the privations facing early neotropical naturalists in the modern era. Without illustrated field guides, Peter often was obliged to create cut-and-paste looseleaf notebooks of species information to support his activities. In illustrating tour lectures (given off-hours to trip participants), he would cart along as many as 5,000+ color slides. Further, in early days, there was little available eco-lodging, poorly developed local transportation options, and few individuals with on-sight observation skills – to say nothing of the absence of the internet, GPS, cell phones, email, PowerPoint, advanced photo optics / sound equipment, and readily available field ID resources.

Peter's book is designed to appeal to a range of readers. The first is eco-tourism beginners, for whom he provides a great deal of patiently detailed and useful background information (including cultural and ecological features, as well as indicating target bird species). While his many tales of derring-do and near calamity may startle those accustomed to a tamer range of field experiences, they remind us that nature remains wild; and for many, this is a core attraction.

The second audience group is experienced local field naturalists looking for ideas as to where they might travel abroad. For this group, the book is an excellent primer. And the list of travel possibilities is truly vast.

The third group is veteran natural history travelers, for whom the narratives are likely to provoke moments of nostalgia, along with an opportunity to compare Peter's many adventures with their own (including encounters with memorable natural history pioneers). Among the significant figures of the era Peter encountered include Roger Tory Peterson, Robert Ridgely, Ted Parker, Arnold Small, the Leaky family, Jane Goodall, Ernst Mayr, E.O. Wilson, and Peter Matthiessen, to name just a few. Also luminaries from the New York City area, such as Tom Davis, Stuart Keith, Michel Kleinbaum, and Guy Tudor. Thus, the book is both an encyclopedia of prime international nature sites, as well as a Who's Who of the mid-century natural history community.

In the third group (and now from an entirely personal point of view), I have visited many of the sites Peter de-

scribed, especially in the neotropics, but mainly in search of butterflies, more so than birds. Yet many of our travel experiences have been strikingly similar. On the Napo River in Peru, which Peter describes, there was the day when the back panel of our peki-peki (a small canoe-style boat, named for the sound of its one-cylinder outboard motor) fell off, leaving us stranded for an extended time along an isolated riverbank. Or, on another trip, when water levels in the river were low, we had to leap from the boat to lift the hull over rocks along a scratchy stretch of rapids. Or, the time I had to aggressively elbow a young tour guide bus driver sitting beside me on a treacherous dirt road in the eastern Andes near Cuzco. The young man had dozed off just as we were approaching a hairpin turn, with a thousand foot drop just off the shoulder. Somehow these adventures seldom end in peril,

but they underscore the fact that unpredictability still remains in the natural world. Thanks to Peter for stirring these recollections, among many others.

A final thought. I was intrigued by Peter's report that, in scouting tour sites in Mexico in 1971, a young local boy alerted him to "the butterflies" in a nearby valley in the state of Michoacán. Being more interested in tracking an Imperial Woodpecker, Peter confesses to having forfeited the opportunity to upstage Fred Urquhart in discovering the overwintering site of eastern Monarch butterflies. Had he done so, my late friend Lincoln Brower (a foremost early researcher on the Michoacán Monarchs), most likely would have been regaled among Peter's long list of friends and associates in this engaging memoir.

Upcoming Linnaean Field Trips

2/28/26

Brooklyn Coastal Birding

Leader: Peter Dorosh

Registration open from Monday, February 16 at 9 am to Wednesday, February 25 at 6 pm.

3/7/26

Croton Point Park

Leader: Ethan Goodman

Registration open from Monday, February 16 at 9 am to Wednesday, February 25 at 6 pm.

3/7/26

Central Park Winter Bird Walk & Coffee Hour

Leaders: Erika Piik and David Spawn

Registration open from Monday, February 23 at 9 am to Wednesday, March 4 at 6 pm.

3/11/26

Birds & Brews: Bird Jazz in Harlem

Leaders: Amanda Bielskas, Alan Drogan, and Elijah Shiffer

Registration open from Monday, March 2 at 9 am to Sunday, March 8 at 6 pm.

3/28/26

Staten Island Hot Spots and Early Spring Migrants

Leader: Seth Wollney

Registration open from Monday, March 16 at 9 am to Wednesday, March 25 at 6 pm.

4/4/26

Better Bird Photography Workshop in Prospect Park

Leader: Tom Stephenson

Registration open from Monday, March 23 at 9 am to Wednesday, April 1 at 6 pm.

4/11/26

Green-Wood Cemetery

Leader: Rob Jett

Registration open from Monday, March 30 at 9 am to Wednesday, April 8 at 6 pm.

4/29/26

Birds & Brews: Central Park

Leaders: Amanda Bielskas, Alan Drogan, Gillian Henry

Registration open from Monday, April 20 at 9 am to Sunday, April 26 at 6 pm.

5/2/26

Pine Barrens For Spring: Butterflies and More

Leader: Rick Cech

Registration open from Monday, April 20 at 9 am to Wednesday, April 29 at 6 pm.

To register for any of these events or view more Field Trips please visit our website: <https://www.linnaeannewyork.org/>

Hold the Date! Birdathon for Great Gull Island May 2nd - 3rd, 2026

Each spring, Linnaean Society members flock to the field—not just to view migrating birds, but also to raise vital funds for the Great Gull Island Project, home to the Western Hemisphere's largest nesting colonies of Common and Roseate Terns. This year's Birdathon Weekend, will be held May 2-3 2026.

**148th Annual Meeting
Tuesday, March 10, 2026**



**Open only to members and their guests
(Invitations were emailed January 26th)**

Dr. Trevor Price

**Eisenmann Medalist Lecture
A Bird's Life in the Anthropocene**



Hume's Warbler

Humans are causing many changes to nature. Dr. Price will describe some of the evolving birdlife of India, where he has worked for the past 50 years. After a general introduction to this biodiversity hotspot, he will focus on one species. The Hume's Warbler breeds in the Himalaya and winters on the plains of India, numbering in the 10s of millions of birds. The warbler is breeding earlier and being affected by climate change. Its call has changed completely, apparently triggered by noise in cities.

Together these challenges posed by changes in the environment have been ameliorated by a combination of plasticity (shifting lay date in response to earlier snow melt) and cultural evolution (copying of calls from others).

Trevor Price is a professor in the department of Ecology and Evolution at the University of Chicago. His primary research has been how bird species form, focusing on the Old World warblers. He has published two books: Speciation in Birds (2008) and Ecology of a Changed World (2022).

Date: Tuesday, March 10, 2026

Time: 6:00 pm

Location: Liederkrantz Club, 6 East 87th St, New York City, NY

The Mission Statement of the Linnaean Society of New York
The Linnaean Society of New York provides a forum for the sharing and advancement of science-based knowledge through a program of lectures and field trips. It fosters an appreciation of the natural world with a special emphasis on birds. Founded in 1878, the Society comprises dedicated amateurs and professionals interested in the study, preservation, and enjoyment of nature and the environment.

About the Society

Established by amateur naturalists in 1878, the Linnaean Society of New York has worked to foster learning about, and stewardship of, the natural world. Its original members included H.B. Bailey, E.P. Bicknell, Ernest Ingersoll, C. Hart Merriam, and John Burroughs. The Society focuses particularly on birds and their place in nature. It organizes regular birding field trips to various destinations in the New York City area and beyond, sponsors lectures from experts on birding and natural history topics, and offers a variety of birding resources, including a rare bird alert. It also takes a leadership role in addressing

local conservation issues of concern to birders and natural history enthusiasts. Its aspirations are reflected in its highest award, the Eisenmann Medal, which is given each year to honor "excellence in ornithology and encouragement of the amateur."

Officers

Acting President	Peter Davenport
Vice President	Amanda Bielskas
Vice President Programming	Karen Becker
Secretary	Meredith Barchat
Recording Secretary	Lisa Kroop
Treasurer	Debbie Mullins
Editor	Debbie Becker

Please visit our website for additional information:

<https://www.linnaeannewyork.org/>