I had an amazing time at the 2023 New York Birders conference this past weekend! My experience started Friday night with the NYS Young Birder’s Club bird quiz. The quiz really stumped me, and my fellow young birders did a great job in making it so difficult yet engaging. I was teamed up with a table of very experienced birders of all ages and they were highly challenged as well. We managed to place third however and received a very nice ribbon decorated with a beautiful illustration by NYSYBC vice president Emma Murphy!

The next morning, my mother and I braced ourselves for a morning of torrential downpour. When we arrived at Croton Point Park, there was a light drizzle and our group leaders were afraid that there wouldn’t be that many birds. Thankfully, the weather didn’t worsen and we had a great time! We saw a vast variety of birds thriving in many different habitats: grasslands, the Hudson River, and a heavily forested area. My favorite of the birds we saw was the Northern Harrier. They contrasted crisply against the light overcast sky, enabling me to see them in great detail as they flew close to our group. I also enjoyed seeing a pair of Field Sparrows (my favorite species of sparrow!) in the grasslands and a Nashville Warbler in the woods!

After we left, the rain became much heavier and I was grateful to return to the warmth of our hotel. I attended the workshops not too long after we returned. First, I attended the Bird Sounds Workshop, which I was very excited about. I am very bad at birding by ear, so I was eager to learn about the different methods that may help me improve this aspect. The presenter, Tom Stephenson, was great at explaining his techniques. He focused most on remembering bird sounds by associating the sound with an image and then further relating that image to the bird making the sound. I realized that I sometimes do this too, although not to the degree he does. For example, I associate the songs of the Carolina Wren with the sounds I hear when I visit my grandmother’s house in Southold, Long Island. Thus, I am able to better remember which songs are sung by the Carolina Wren when I feel a sense of nostalgia related to my many childhood summers spent at this home. I will definitely try to utilize Mr. Stephenson’s methods in the future and hopefully they will help me improve this skill.

After this presentation, I took some time to explore the various booths set up in the halls of the hotel. I was amazed by the plethora of birding materials (such as books, stickers, earrings, and information on preventing bird window strikes) and bought two stickers! Afterwards, I attended Dr. Shai Mitra’s workshop on sea watching. I was thoroughly engaged throughout this presentation, especially when Dr. Mitra was speaking about hurricanes and the amazing species they bring to our shores.

After Dr. Mitra’s workshop, I explored the stalls some more and had my field guide signed by David Sibley! Meeting him for the first time increased my pre-existing excitement for our meet and greet with him later, as well as his presentation after the banquet. At the meet and greet, it was amazing to hear what he had to say about his own experiences birding, especially in his youth. Additionally, it was fun to learn about his life list and his spark bird as this is a birding experience he truly shares with all of us young birders—it was a very nice way to connect. His presentation later at the banquet was fascinating. As an artist currently completing a visual arts thesis mostly on birds for my IB Art class, it was captivating to learn about Mr. Sibley’s own processes for ornithological illustration. I really learned a lot from somebody so experienced and skilled. Also, it was nice to hear how he worked together with gouache and digital art as these are media I use a lot as well.

Overall, I had an incredible time at the 2023 New York Birders Conference. I always love connecting with other like-minded birders, especially with those from all over New York State. I learned a lot about birding and the field of ornithology as a whole and I am excited to implement what I have learned into my future birding adventures!