

# THE BRONX COUNTY BIRD CLUB

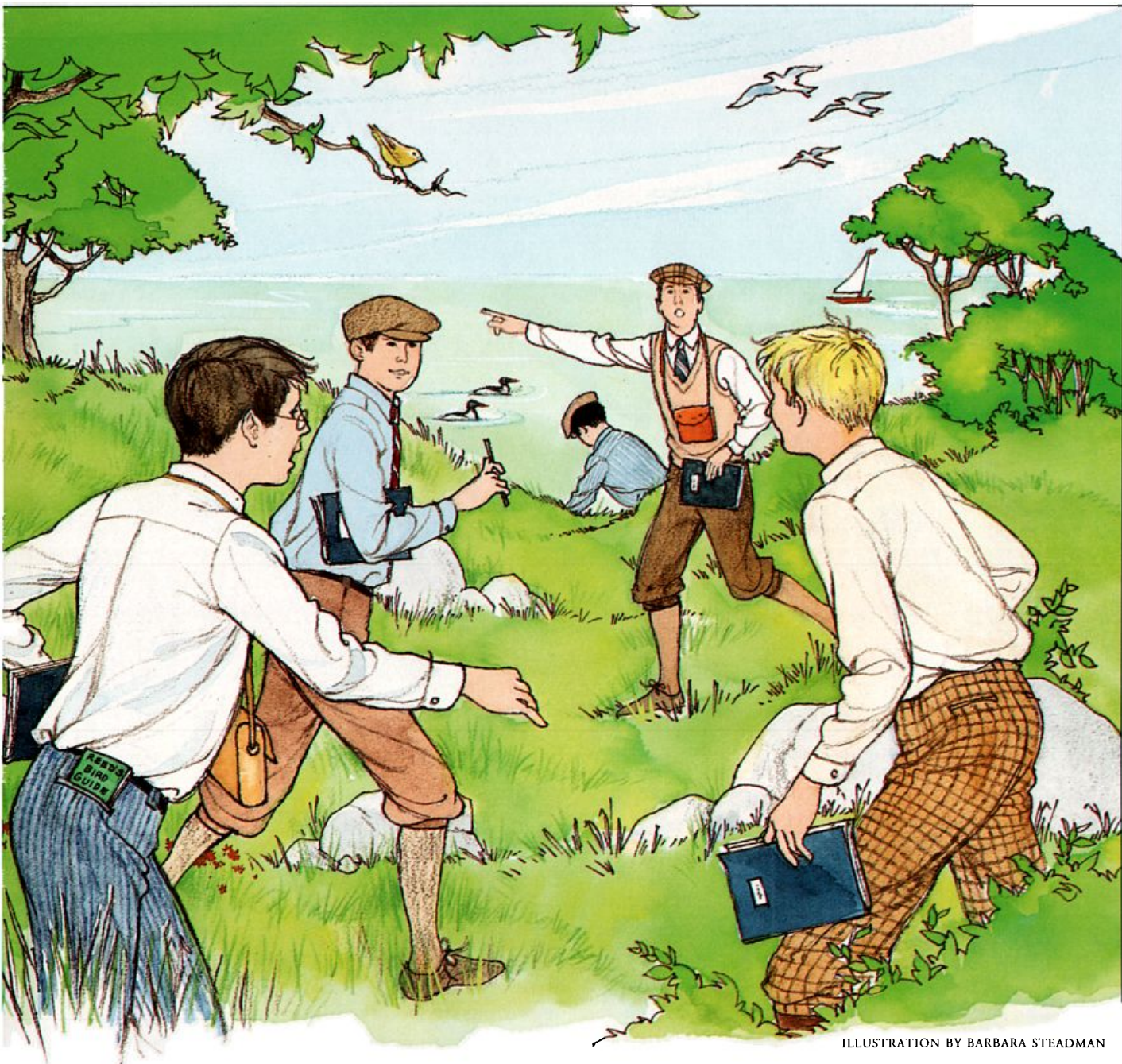


ILLUSTRATION BY BARBARA STEADMAN

# Memories of Ten Boys And an Era That Shaped American Birding

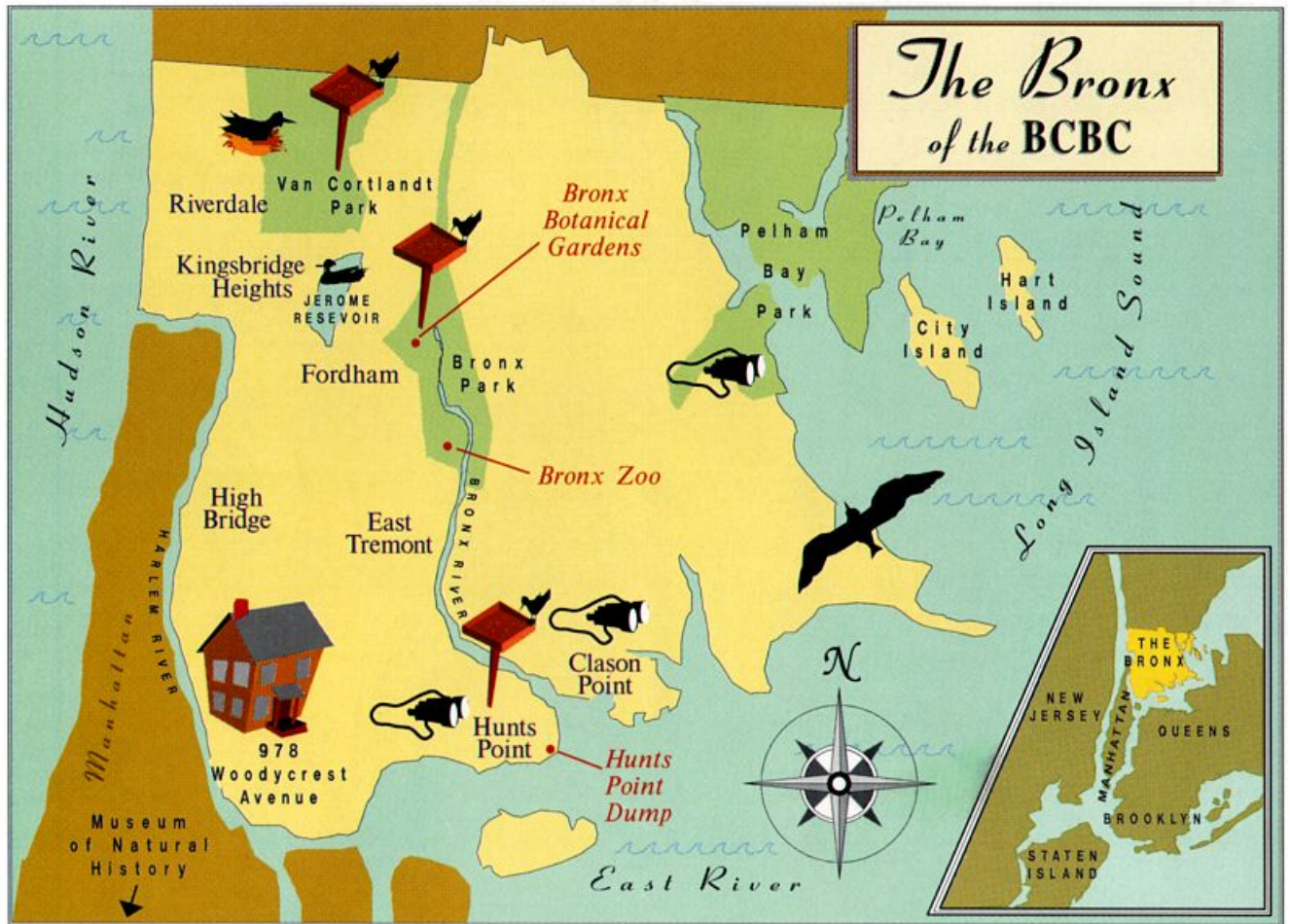
by John Farrand, Jr.

*Sixty-seven years ago this November, a group of teenagers formed the Bronx County Bird Club. This story is based in large part on conversations with surviving members, Joe Hickey and Roger Peterson and honorary member Helen Cruickshank —Editor.*

ON SATURDAY, NOVEMBER 29, 1924, at Princeton University, a scholar declared that the Great Chalice of Antioch, excavated in 1910, was not, as some had claimed, the Holy Grail. At the Metropolitan Opera House in New York City, Saturday

night's performance of *La Bohème* was delayed by solemn tributes to its composer, Giacomo Puccini, who had died earlier in the day in Brussels. A federal court in Seattle barred Prohibition officials from shutting down a radio station that had been broadcasting children's bedtime stories suspected of containing coded messages to bootleggers.

Such events were of small concern to nine teenagers sitting that same evening in the attic of the house at 978 Woodycrest Avenue in



the High Bridge section of the Bronx. It was well after sundown on a day that had begun with rain and ended with clear skies. The nine boys, the oldest 17, were gathered to form what they had already decided to call the Bronx County Bird Club—the “BCBC.”

According to the minutes of that first meeting, it “was judged that two officers were sufficient to conduct the business of the Club.” “The chairman was to preside at all meetings and in his absence the secretary was to appoint a temporary chairman.” “The secretary was to maintain the minutes of the proceedings at the meetings. He is also to collect all official records of observations made by members of the Club.” The chairman they elected was John F. Kuerzi, whose brother Richard was another of the nine members of the fledgling BCBC. Their parents had offered their attic

as a place for the boys to meet. The secretary was Joseph J. Hickey, who lived across town in the Hunts Point section of the Bronx.

With these formalities out of the way, and with winter just around the corner, the boys decided to set up several bird-feeding stations. It was decided that Allan D. Cruickshank, who lived in Kingsbridge Heights, and Frederick J. Ruff, from the Fordham section, would maintain two stations in Van Cortlandt Park. Four stations would be kept at the Bronx Botanical Gardens by the Kuerzis, and two more would be run at Hunts Point by Joe Hickey and three other Hunts Point residents—Richard A. Herbert, Irving Kassoy, and John F. Matuszewski. The ninth member, Philip Kessler, came from the East Tremont section, just south of the Bronx Zoo.

#### EARLY BIRDERS

All nine boys had been birding for some time before they formed the BCBC. In fact, Dick Herbert and Joe Hickey lived in the same neighborhood, and had known each other since the second grade. They and Matty Matuszewski attended St. Athanasius Parochial School, where they were taught by the Sisters of Charity. On snowy winter days Joe and the others raced their sleds down Seneca Avenue towards the Bronx River.

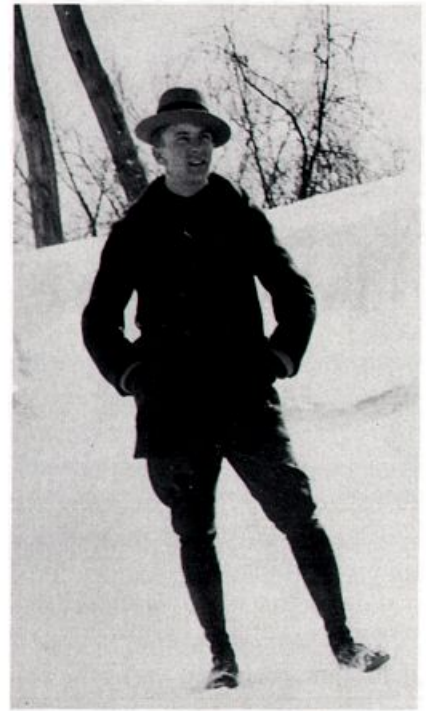
In 1918, Matty’s older brother Charlie, a member of Boy Scout Troop 149, bought a copy of Chester A. Reed’s checkbook-sized *Bird Guide: Land Birds East of the Rockies*, in order to work on his Bird Study Merit Badge. “We got ahold of that,” remembers Joe, 73 years later. Then he, Matty, and Dick started looking for birds. They soon discovered the Hunts Point Dump,



**Allan Cruickshank, N.Y.U. '31.** Allan was a javelin medalist in the Junior A.A.U. National Championship in 1928. He had a "terrific arm," says Joe. "He was a good man to have at your side in a snowball fight." Photograph courtesy of the National Audubon Society.



**Joe Hickey, N.Y.U. '30.** In his junior year, Joe won two gold medals: the One-mile Indoor and One-mile Outdoor championships of the Intercollegiate Amateur Athletes Association of America. Photograph courtesy of J. J. Hickey.



**John Matuszewski, Syracuse '29.** Matty was a student in Forestry, and is shown standing on the campus in February 1926. Photograph courtesy of J. J. Hickey.

just a few blocks away and in those days a prime locality for Snowy Owls and rare gulls. They also discovered Irving Kasso, a young immigrant from Russia, who had been out birding on his own. Before long the four birders were calling themselves the "Hunts Dumpers," and Irv was calling Joe "Yosl" (Yiddish for Joseph), and Joe was calling Irv "Izzy."

One day in February 1921, while Joe and Dick were birding in Bronx Park, they came upon a man watch-

ing two chickadees. "He was a most distinguished looking man," Joe remembers. "He had a gold-headed cane, and a Vandyke beard like Charles Evans Hughes. He wore a derby and spoke with a British accent." In Joe's pocket were the boys' field references: Reed's *Bird Guide* and an envelope containing pictures cut out of a copy of Volume I of Elon Howard Eaton's *Birds of New York* that Joe had found in a trash can. The boys struck up an acquaintance, and as the man

quizzed them about birds—including the chickadees (Black-capped, they said)—Joe was glancing at these pictures and quizzing the man in return, asking questions like: "Have you ever seen a Ross' Gull?"

The man with the Vandyke was Charles M. Johnston, who worked for the Encyclopaedia Britannica. He had never seen a Ross' Gull, but he was impressed by the boys' knowledge of birds. A member of the Linnaean Society of New York, he suggested that they begin attending its meetings, held on the second and fourth Tuesdays of every month, at the American Museum of Natural History, in the room that now houses the Museum Shop. It was mainly through the Linnaean Society that the Hunts Dumpers met the other Bronx County boys. Joe, Jack Kuerzi, and Matty Matuszewski had been elected members of the Society just a month before the BCBC was founded.

Allan Cruickshank, or "Cruicky,"

#### THE FIRST MEETING OF THE BCBC

November 29, 1924

Name	Neighborhood	Nickname	Position
John F. Kuerzi	High Bridge	Jack	Chairman
Joseph J. Hickey	Hunt's Point	Joe	Secretary
Allan D. Cruickshank	Kingsbridge Heights	Cruicky	Member
Richard A. Herbert	Hunt's Point	Dick	Member
Irving Kasso	Hunt's Point	Irv or Izzy	Member
Philip Kessler	East Tremont	Phil	Member
Richard G. Kuerzi	High Bridge	Dick	Member
John Matuszewski	Hunt's Point	Matty	Member

was born in the Virgin Islands, but his family soon moved to New York, and he spent his early years living on West Twenty-third Street in Manhattan. One morning, as he trudged east toward Eighth Avenue to buy his mother a newspaper, he spotted a screech-owl in a willow tree. This discovery, remarkable even then, sparked his interest in birds. Before long he was visiting Central Park. In 1919, when he was 12 years old, his family moved to Kingsbridge Heights in the Bronx, where Cruicky began to haunt Van Cortlandt Park and the Jerome Reservoir.

In October 1922, Jack and Dick found a mockingbird at Hunts Point, and their note on it, the first venture into print by any of the Bronx boys, appeared the following month in *Bird-Lore*, the ancestor of both *Audubon* and *American Birds*. The Kuerzis had been encouraged in their interest in birds by their father, who joined them on the Christmas Census of December 23, 1922. This census, the first ever conducted in the Bronx by future members of the BCBC, covered Pelham Bay, Van Cortlandt, and Bronx parks. It netted 35 species, including six towhees "seen in damp, low woods off Allerton Avenue." On their second census in 1923, Jack and Dick found 26 species, among them a Short-eared Owl flushed at the mouth of the Bronx River.

The mockingbird note and the two censuses were not the Kuerzis' only publications in the years before the founding of the BCBC. On October 14, 1923, a female Black-backed Woodpecker, then called the "Arctic Three-toed Woodpecker," turned up among the hemlocks in Bronx Park. Using a pair of 8X binoculars, the boys even saw the bird's three toes. Four days later a male appeared. They reported these unusual northern visitors in *Bird-Lore* in 1924. A male, almost cer-

tainly the same one, appeared off and on for the next few years, and long before it was last seen on November 4, 1927, it had acquired the name "Old Faithful." In the July-August issue for 1924, the boys reported an Orange crowned Warbler at the Moravian Cemetery on Staten Island.

A few months after that report, when the BCBC was founded, the annual Christmas Census was close at hand. The BCBC had plans to make. At their second meeting on December 6, a new strategy for Christmas Censuses was born. The group would divide into teams,

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Tory Peterson.**

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with each team responsible for a specific territory. Thus, each area would be covered in greater detail than if everyone had traveled together. Members would scout the territory beforehand and stake out any rarities. Cruicky and Fred would take Jerome Reservoir, Van Cortlandt, and Riverdale. The Kuerzis were assigned Bronx Park and Saw Mill Lane. Phil and Matty would cover Pelham Bay Park and the Baychester marshes, while Dick, Irv, and Joe worked Hunts Point and Clason Point.

The big day was Sunday, December 28. The boys were in the field from before dawn until after dark. At eight-fifteen that night, they met back in the Kuerzis' attic to tally their results. "When the mark of thirty-five was reached," read the minutes, "the excitement attained a high pitch; and when the grand total was found to be forty-

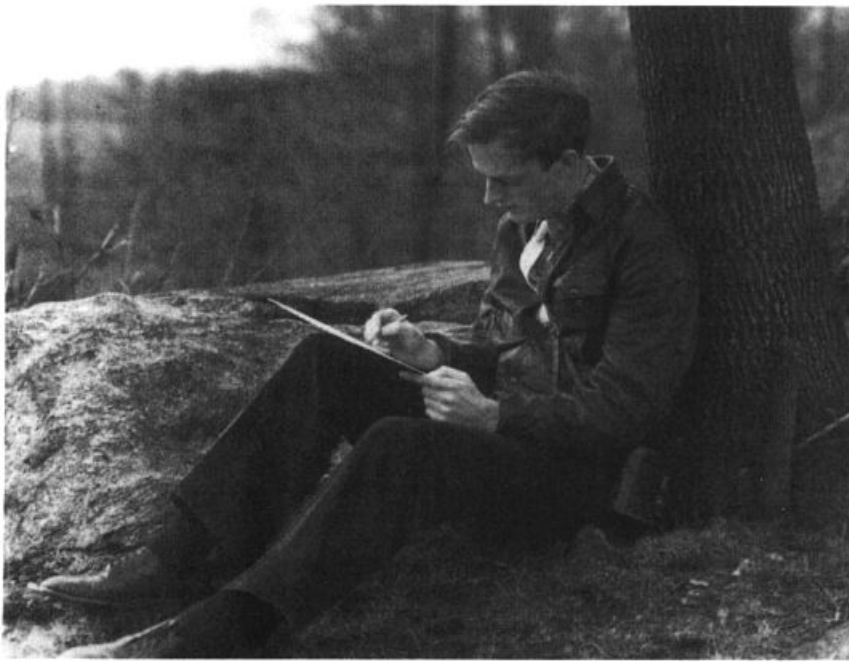
nine, everyone was amazed and [at] the same time overjoyed." The stake-out idea had paid off. At Hunts Point, Joe found the drake Redhead first seen on December 4 and Irv produced his two "Wilson's" Snipe. Cruicky found the flock of Common Mergansers at Jerome Reservoir. The secretary wrote: "Everyone felt satisfied that the long list of birds recorded clearly brought out the results that could be obtained by cooperation."

Cooperation obtained even better results in 1925, when five teams recorded 67 species. The total rose to 83 in 1926, to 87 in 1927, and to 93 in 1929. But long before this, the BCBC's census totals had elicited the words "most remarkable" from the Linnaean Society. Everyone began to pay attention to these young birders working New York City's northernmost borough and census-takers in other areas adopted their "divide and conquer" approach. In 1935, on the BCBC's twelfth census, the figure passed the century mark: 107 species, more than twice the number found in 1924.

If you were young and interested in birds, the Bronx was the right place to be in the mid-1920s. In January 1927, a tall, quiet 18-year-old arrived in New York City from a small town in western New York to study at the Art Students League on West Fifty-seventh Street. His name was Roger Tory Peterson. It

**MEMBERS OF THE BCBC**

Name	Specialty
Allan D. Cruickshank	Author, naturalist, photographer
Richard A. Herbst	Peregrine Falcons
Joseph J. Hickey	Author, professor, mentor
Irving Kassoy	Barn Owls
Philip Kessler	
John F. Kuerzi	
Richard G. Kuerzi	Tree Swallows
John Matuszewski	
Frederick J. Ruff	
Roger Tory Peterson	Artist, author, photographer



**Roger Tory Peterson in his twenties. Sitting under an ash tree, he is undoubtedly working on his field guide. Photograph courtesy of R. T. Peterson.**

was not his first visit to the city. In November 1925, he had come to a meeting of the American Ornithologists' Union. On an A.O.U. field trip to Long Beach, he had logged 13 life birds, including a "Brünnich's" Murre. At this A.O.U. meeting Peterson had just brief encounters with Joe and Cruicky, both of whom were in school and could not come to the American Museum during the day. But he formed a close friendship with Bernard Nathan, one of the leading young birders in Brooklyn. In 1927, when he came to stay, Bernie's mother invited him to live in their home.

Bernie was already a member of the Linnaean Society, and the two quickly began to attend meetings together. Peterson became a Linnaean member that same year, and the Society's records for 1927 contain several reports by Peterson and Nathan (or Nathan and Peterson) from Dyker Heights in Brooklyn: Greater Scaup, Bufflehead, Turkey Vulture, Blacklegged Kittiwake, Olive-sided Flycatcher, and Savannah Sparrow. Also among these 1927 records is a report of Sharp-tailed and Seaside sparrows seen at Long Beach on April 3 by

Peterson and Hickey. Through the Linnaean Society, Peterson had established contact with the Bronx County birders.

The BCBC had two unwritten membership requirements: you had to live in the Bronx, and you had to

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**The BCBC had two unwritten membership requirements: you had to live in the Bronx, and you had to be good.**

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be good. Before long, Roger Peterson, a gifted "foreigner" who clearly failed the first requirement, was accepted because he scored so well on the second. He became the first full member who didn't live in the Bronx. The BCBC now numbered ten.

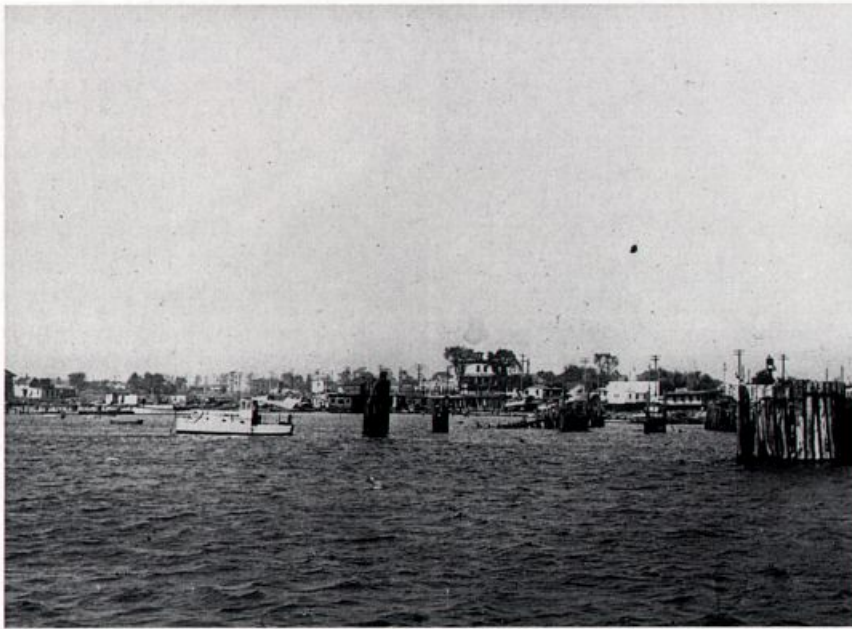
Once he was a member Peterson received nicknames just as Cruicky, Izzy, and Matty had. Cruicky sometimes called him the "Big Swede." Because he referred so often to his experiences back in Jamestown, New York, Joe took to calling him "Roger Tory Jamestown Peterson."

In late May and early June of 1927, "Roger," as he was more usually known, made a trip that would be as memorable now as it was then. With money he earned decorating furniture, he took a Clyde Line steamer down the coast to South Carolina and spent a few days with Arthur T. Wayne, the dean of South Carolina ornithologists. With Alexander Sprunt, Jr., and Burnham Chamberlain, two Charleston ornithologists, he visited Cape Romain. When he returned, he was full of stories about Royal Terns, Black Skimmers, Brown Pelicans, and Arthur T. Wayne. Joe was soon calling him "Roger Tory Wayne Jamestown Peterson." Joe, Dick Herbert, and Irv soon made a trip of their own to Cape Charles in Virginia, where they saw many of the birds Roger had seen in South Carolina.

By the late 1920s, the BCBC's sphere of activities—the "Greater Bronx"—extended over all five boroughs of New York City, northern New Jersey, Long Island, southwestern Connecticut, and as far up the Hudson River as Putnam County. Many were the adventures of the BCBC in these years, among them the famous Bromo-Seltzer bottle that was mistaken for a bluebird on a sand dune at Long Beach, an encounter later mentioned in print both by Hickey and Peterson.

The most adventuresome BCBC member seems to have been Allan Cruickshank. In 1926, Cruicky found a Brown Creeper's nest in Van Cortlandt Park, a discovery important enough to merit an article in *Bird-Lore*. He made local history when he published his discovery of a King Rail's nest in Van Cortlandt Park on May 26, 1927. Van Cortlandt's cattail marsh was much larger then; Cruicky also found Least Bitterns, Soras, Virginia Rails, and a Common Moorhen nesting there.

What must be termed a misad-



One of the boys' favorite birding spots, Clasen Point, as viewed from the East River. Courtesy of the Bronx County Historical Society.

venture occurred one day when Cruicky came across a bird blind on a mud flat on Staten Island. In front of the blind were scores of shore-birds, and Cruicky, determined that no hunter was going to get a shot at them, sprinted down the beach and scared them away. Out of the blind, camera in hand, stepped an irate James P. Chapin, President of the Linnaean Society, Curator of Birds at the American Museum, and a renowned authority on African ornithology. He was not amused!

A celebrated BCBC adventure involving Cruicky and Joe took place on the afternoon of April 30, 1928. Both were now students at New York University. During a baseball game between the N.Y.U. freshmen and George Washington High School, at Ohio Field, Cruicky and Joe glanced up into the gray sky. There, coming over the right-field fence, was an American Swallow-tailed Kite, only the seventh ever seen or collected in the Greater New York area and the first found within the city limits. It is likely that no one else even noticed the bird. And it is just as likely that two excited fans in the bleachers forgot the final score. For the record,

N.Y.U. won, 12 - 0.

On June 19, 1928, T. Donald Carter, a mammalogist at the American Museum, and Philip DuMont, a well-known field observer, confirmed the identification of a

## When prohibition ended in 1933, the BCBC shifted its Christmas Census tallies from the attic to "Unter den Linden," a beer garden.

Purple Gallinule on Harlem Mere at the north end of Central Park. It happened to be the second Tuesday of the month and a meeting of the Linnaean Society was scheduled for that very night. After leaving the meeting, it was nearly 11 p.m. when the BCBC raced off to find the gallinule. There it was, pumping its head as it swam, silhouetted against the reflected lights of Harlem.

The BCBC usually met in the Kuerzis' attic, though they sometimes gathered at Joe's house or Irv's house. But perhaps the most memorable meeting of all was held at the

home of T. Donald Carter just two months before he confirmed the Purple Gallinule on Harlem Mere. Carter, who had just returned from Mount Roraima in Venezuela, described his trip with the help of lantern slides. The minutes record that "Mrs. Carter served sandwiches and refreshments in such profusion as to make the meeting seem almost a banquet." But what really stole the show were the blow gun and bow and arrow Carter had brought back with him. "These were received with acclaim and practice (was) immediately instituted on Mrs. Carter's pillows and other things." Not surprisingly, according to the minutes, "field notes were not presented in formal fashion and so could not be preserved here."

Gatherings of the BCBC were always stimulating, but it was at meetings of the Linnaean Society that the boys' skills were truly sharpened and tested. In the mid-1920s Linnaean meetings were dominated by Ludlow Griscom, an assistant curator of birds at the American Museum and the acknowledged leader in field identification. Peterson later wrote that Griscom was "a bit austere in keeping us in line when we dared report anything as unlikely as a Hoary Redpoll or a Sabine's Gull. We were cross-examined ruthlessly." But, he added, Griscom "was our God and his *Birds*

### THE BCBC IN 1956

The Last Year That a BCBC Member Took Part in a Bronx Christmas Count

Name	Residence
Joe Hickey	Madison, Wisconsin
Allan Cruickshank	Rockledge, Florida
Richard Herbert	Bronx, New York
Irving Kasoy	Columbus, Ohio
Richard Kuerzi	Georgia
Roger Tory Peterson	Old Lyme, Connecticut
Frederick Ruff	Unknown
John Kuerzi	Deceased
Philip Kessler	Deceased
John Matuszewski	Deceased

of the New York City Region, published in 1923, became our Bible.”

Jack Kuerzi went so far as to part his hair in the middle, like Griscom, and several BCBC members adopted his slight lisp in such words as “unprecedented” (which Griscom pronounced “unprethedednt”) and “common summer resident” (“common thummer rethident”). Griscom’s figures of speech became part of the language of the BCBC: “That record isn’t worth a cheesy damn...Now someone find a bird with some zip in it...I don’t like the look of that bird...That’s just a weed bird.”

Ludlow Griscom moved from the American Museum to Harvard University in 1927, but he left behind a valuable legacy. Edwin Way Teale once asked Griscom how he distinguished difficult species so quickly and easily. He replied: “It is largely a matter of having a perfect mental image of each bird.” This idea, novel and even scorned during the shotgun era, is still the basic premise of field identification.

A few years later, the idea bore unexpected fruit. Griscom’s influence on Roger Tory Peterson is a debt Roger has never failed to acknowledge. As early as 1930, he was planning a field guide, with his own paintings and text, incorporating what he had taught himself and what he had learned from Griscom and from his fellow members of the BCBC and the Linnaean Society. While he was “putting it all down,” as he has described assembling this first field guide, he received constant encouragement from William Vogt, then assistant editor for the New York Academy of Sciences, later editor of *Bird-Lore*, and ultimately national director of Planned Parenthood.

According to Joe, Vogt “was much interested in young people—the BCBC and R.T.P.” Vogt played a critical role in the publication of the first edition of a *Field Guide to*



**The BCBC embarks for Bonaventure Island in Quebec, July 1930. Left to right: Dick Herbert, Jack Kuerzi, John Barry of Syracuse, New York, Dick Kuerzi, and Irv Kasso. Photograph/T. Donald Carter. Courtesy of the American Museum of Natural History.**

*the Birds*. Peterson dedicated the guide to Vogt (and to Clarence E. Allen), a dedication that still stands after three revisions and five decades. When the *Field Guide* appeared in 1934, Charles A. Urner, another of the BCBC’s guiding lights, stood up at a Linnaean meeting to say what a remarkable book it was and to propose that a letter of congratulations be sent to Roger.

As the BCBC moved through the 1920s and into the 1930s, there were important changes. Matty Matuszewski and Fred Ruff went off to Syracuse University to study forestry and were seldom around except for Christmas Censuses. Joe Hickey, Allan Cruickshank, and Phil Kessler enrolled at New York University, where Hickey and Cruickshank were both on the track team and where Hickey was president of the senior class in the same year that Cruicky was president of the junior class. In 1931 Roger Peterson left New York to teach at the Rivers Country Day School near Boston, where he continued to work on the field guide.

Prohibition ended on December 5, 1933. The BCBC shifted its

Christmas Census tallies from the attic to “Unter den Linden,” a beer garden near the end of the Pelham Bay line. “None of the Bronx boys drank hard liquor then,” recalls Joe. “We couldn’t afford it.”

The major event for those who stayed in New York was the arrival of Ernst Mayr in 1931. Mayr, who had received his doctorate at the University of Berlin, became a research associate in ornithology at the American Museum at the age of 27. He was eager to learn about American birds, and the Bronx boys were just as eager to teach him. So “Ernie,” who would one day be this century’s leading evolutionary theorist, was soon out in the field with the BCBC. He went on several Christmas Censuses, including the one in 1935 that logged 107 species.

The BCBC introduced Ernst Mayr to American birds, and he repaid them by introducing them to scientific ornithology. Several members attended Mayr’s monthly seminars for amateurs, where together they reviewed the ornithological literature—chiefly German, Joe recalls. “Everyone should have a problem,” Mayr was fond of saying,



by which he meant a research topic. Before long, Dick Herbert was studying Peregrines on the Palisades and Irv Kassoy was spending nights with the Barn Owls in the old Huntington Mansion at Pelham Bay.

Joe Hickey, who says "the greatest influence on me as an adult was Uncle Ernst," finally gave up his job at Con Edison and left New York to work with Aldo Leopold at the University of Wisconsin. That was in 1941, the year "Christmas Census" was changed to "Christmas Count," and just one week before Pearl Harbor. In 1943, Hickey published his classic *A Guide to Bird Watching*, which explained the many research opportunities open to amateurs.

In time, Joe Hickey carried out landmark research of his own on bird mortality and on the effects of DDT, giving definitive answers to many of the questions raised by Rachel Carson. He became President of the American Ornithologists' Union, a founder of The Nature Conservancy, and Professor (now Emeritus) of Wildlife Ecology at the University of Wisconsin in Madison, where he still lives, half a century after he arrived.

As the war came and the years passed, the ranks of the BCBC dwindled. Jack Kuerzi, whom Peterson says was "the brilliant one," and who had shown so much promise that Frank M. Chapman offered him a job at the American Museum, died in the 1930s. Matty Matuszewski, by then a successful nurseryman on Long Island, died in the mid-1940s. Phil Kessler was lost in World War II. Dick Kuerzi, whom Peterson describes as the sharpest birder in the BCBC, moved to Georgia, where he remained active in birding and conducted research on Tree Swallows. Roger Peterson and Joe Hickey had also moved away, although both came back for Christmas Counts.

Before the war, Allan Cruickshank developed into a leading bird photographer. His first bird pictures, taken with his father's camera, had been of the nesting King Rails in Van Cortlandt Park. By the time he graduated from high school, his goal was to capture on film every species in North America. He became "as good a black-and-white photographer as any that existed in this country," says Roger, and eventually amassed a collection of 40,000 negatives representing more than 400 species. He joined the staff of the National Audubon Society in 1935, and with an interruption during the war, served for 37 years as lecturer, official photographer, and bird instructor at the Audubon Camp of Maine. In 1939

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## **Nine people gathered on January 30, 1978, at a motel in Ft. Myers, Florida, not far from where Irv Kassoy was living.**

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he married Helen Gere of Rye, New York, a skillful bird photographer in her own right. In 1942 he published *Birds Around New York City*, the successor to Griscom's book of 1923. Allan and Helen Cruickshank moved to Rockledge, Florida, in 1953. From 1954 until 1971, he was editor of the Christmas Bird Count, and gave reports of rarities the same "ruthless" grilling he himself had received from Griscom years before. In his last year as editor he presided over 963 counts with 18,798 participants.

Roger Peterson was also a member of the Audubon staff, serving as its education director in New York from 1934 to 1943, and as an Audubon screen tour lecturer from 1946 to 1972. His classic *Birds Over America*, illustrated with his own superb photographs, appeared

in 1947. The *Field Guide* had gone into a third edition, and there was also a *Field Guide to Western Birds*. In the 1950s he moved from the Washington, D.C. area to Old Lyme, Connecticut, where he still resides.

Irving Kassoy became a jeweler and dealer in jeweler's supplies. He continued to study Barn Owls and go on Bronx Christmas Counts until he moved to Columbus, Ohio, in 1950. The firm he founded is still on West Forty-seventh Street off Fifth Avenue. I. Kassoy, Inc., is a name that is known and respected worldwide.

Dick Herbert, a banker who lived in the same house on Fox Street in Hunts Point well into the 1950s, was the last of the original BCBC members to take part in a Christmas Bird Count on the old territory. On December 23, 1956, he contributed a boldfaced Black-legged Kittiwake to the total. "Excellent details for all unusual birds," noted the exacting CBC editor in Rockledge. The following year, Dick and his wife moved to Delaware. He died in 1960. Five years later, the results of his lifetime study of the Peregrine Falcon appeared in a 33-page paper in *The Auk*, published by Mrs. Herbert with the assistance of Joe Hickey.

On October 11, 1974, Allan Cruickshank died in Gainesville at the age of 67, while hard at work on "The Birds of Brevard County,

### **LAST MEETING OF THE BCBC**

**January 30, 1978 Fort Myers, Florida**

Roger Tory Peterson	Permanent President
Joseph J. Hickey	Permanent Secretary
Irving Kassoy	Member
Richard G. Kuerzi	Member
Frederick J. Ruff	Member
Helen Cruickshank	Honorary Member



**Fort Myers, Florida, 1978. The "Fiftieth Reunion" of the BCBC, photographed by Virginia Peterson with Helen Cruickshank's camera. Left to right: Fred Ruff, Irv Kassoy, Roger Peterson, Helen Cruickshank, Dick Kuerzi, Mrs. Al Thomas, Joe Hickey, and Al Thomas. Photograph courtesy of H. G. Cruickshank.**

Florida." John Devlin, writing in the next day's *New York Times*, called him "a modern Audubon with a camera." His lectures had been heard by nearly three million people, and his photographs had appeared in more than 175 books, including Helen Cruickshank's *Flight Into Sunshine*, winner of the John Burroughs Medal in 1949. Another BCBC member had passed from the scene, an energetic leader both in birding and in conservation, and remembered today as a great teacher with an unflinching sense of humor and a conviction that no bird is a "weed bird."

Over the years, Joe Hickey has kept in touch with almost everyone who has crossed his path. He is still remembered with affection at his grade school, St. Athanasius, even though the sisters who taught him died long ago. Roger Peterson, speaking as a member of the Club, calls him "our organizer," and it was Joe who organized the BCBC's "Fiftieth Reunion." In 1977, when he learned that Irv Kassoy was terminally ill with cancer, he called a

special meeting of the BCBC.

Nine people gathered on January 30, 1978, at a motel in Fort Myers, Florida, not far from where Irv was living. All five surviving Bronx boys were there: Irving Kassoy, Joseph J. Hickey, Richard G. Kuerzi, Roger Tory Peterson, and Frederick J. Ruff. Joe came down from Madison, Wisconsin. Roger arrived from Antarctica with his wife, Virginia Marie Peterson. Helen Gere Cruickshank came over from Rockledge. Allen M. Thomas, a longtime friend of the BCBC who started going on Bronx counts in 1933, was there with his wife.

This meeting was even busier than the first. Roger was unanimously elected Permanent President, Joe was made Permanent Secretary, and Helen Cruickshank, who had gone on her first Bronx count in 1937, was made an Honorary Member, the first woman elected to the BCBC. There were field trips to Corkscrew and the Ding Darling Sanctuary, and there was a lengthy program. Irv talked about his Barn Owls. Dick discussed his Tree

Swallows. The Permanent President showed slides of penguins, the Permanent Secretary talked about his trip to the Pribilofs, and the new Honorary Member presented slides of her recent trip to Africa.

The last meeting of the BCBC adjourned after three days. Within a few months, both Irv Kassoy and Dick Kuerzi died. Irv's notes on the Barn Owl, said to be even more voluminous than Dick Herbert's data on the Peregrine, have never been published.

#### **ONE OF A KIND**

Unlike other bird clubs, the BCBC collected no dues and had no newsletter, constitution, bylaws, committees, or permanent meeting place. Its membership never reached a dozen. Why then did this little group, started by a bunch of city-dwellers in their teens, accomplish so much? The Club was influenced by the Linnaean Society, with its older and more experienced bird men, and by the American Museum of Natural History, with its unrivaled collections and eminent curators. And they lived in New York City. If you can make it there, goes the song, you'll make it anywhere.

No doubt all three of these reasons played a part, but the real answer lies with the boys themselves. The BCBC could not have been anything less than what it was because of Allan Cruickshank, Dick Herbert, Joe Hickey, Irving Kassoy, Philip Kessler, John Kuerzi, Dick Kuerzi, John Matuszewski, Roger Peterson, and Fred Ruff. Thinking of these old friends, Peterson says quite simply, "I couldn't have done the *Field Guide* without them."

But after all, to be a member of the Bronx County Bird Club you had to be good. And they were. Every one of them. ■