Over the past several years, your Rochester Regional Group of the Sierra Club -- consistent with National Club priorities -- has been making concerted efforts to recognize and begin to rectify the massive inequality between white communities and communities of color in our area. As you know, our city is one of the most segregated in the state and in the country. It’s no coincidence that segregation and inequality go hand-in-hand. There is no “separate but equal.”

The injustices that communities of color suffer include racism; poorer health and poorer healthcare; lower wages, discrimination in the job market and the financial system; lack of access to decent housing; and of course, local environments that have more polluted air, water, and land. Our recent work with the PLEX neighborhood advocating with residents for a higher level of cleanup of the Vacuum Oil site highlights this latter injustice. And of course, all these injustices are interconnected; they are the result of systemic racism.

We recognize that climate change worsens all injustices. We and our partner organizations recognize that low income communities and communities of color -- which are often one and the same, no coincidence -- are at greater risk of the increasingly serious impacts of climate change. Therefore, our Forum this year will connect the dots between climate change and the challenges that these communities already face.

We invite you to join us for an open and honest conversation between local climate change organizations and communities that will be most affected by climate change in Rochester. Our host is Pastor Dr. Jonathan McReynolds of the Aenon Missionary Baptist Church, and our facilitator is Kim Smith, candidate for NYS Senate. Our presenters include Ron Garrow, Haudenosaunee-Mohawk and member of our ExCom, Terry Chaka, Director of the Baobab Center in Rochester, and Dorian Hall, President of the PLEX Neighborhood Association.

Ron will share the perspectives of Indigenous Peoples on climate change and their heritage of stewardship of land. Terry will speak about the ancestral connection to the land of people with African ancestry, their rich heritage of healthy living, and their urgent needs. Dorian will share the experience of the PLEX neighborhood collaborating with the Sierra Club and other mostly white organizations as a model for successful collaborations. We’ll start the evening with time to gather and share some light refreshments. Then youth leaders from Teen Empowerment will wow us with a creative, passionate dance performance. Each featured speaker will then briefly share their heritage and/or experiences, to stimulate and challenge us to think, feel, and share. Question and Answer opportunities will follow each speaker’s presentation. Come to talk or just to listen. Before we leave, there will be the always-popular opportunity to visit with representatives of local justice and environmental advocacy organizations.

Climate Change is already here and will continue to affect everyone in our Rochester region and beyond. We don’t always see the effects because other challenges seem to affect us more directly and/or more urgently. What we may not yet realize is that these existing challenges will worsen because of climate change, especially for those who are affected disproportionately, for those who are already suffering the injustices caused by systemic racism. We urge you to show your support for what we are doing and join us on Earth Day, April 22nd! For more information and updates, see our website: https://www.sierraclub.org/atlantic/rochester
When you receive this, single-use plastic bags will be banned in New York State (NYS). A plan over three years in the making, New York’s plastic bag ban went into effect on March 1, 2020. This is a major victory for the environment but we still have a long way to go.

While small, single-use plastic bags, the default option at most retailers, have a big impact on our environment. We’ve probably all seen awful photos of wildlife tangled up in bags, suffocated or strangled, or marine life that died with a stomach full of plastic. And whether they make it to the landfill or float off into the sunset, these bags don’t just disappear. It takes over 500 years for plastic bags to break down, and when they do, they become microplastics: tiny plastic particles that absorb toxins and pollute the environment all over the world. High concentrations of microplastics have even been found in the Arctic.

In New York, we churn through 23 billion plastic grocery bags per year. Nationwide, it’s around 100 billion, only one percent of which are recycled. Given this, and the longevity of plastic bags, a sweeping ban on them is a huge step in the right direction. I still have concerns.

• **Paper bags are still being offered at stores.** Counties have the option to charge five cents per paper bag (exempting SNAP and WIC recipients), but Monroe County elected to forgo that fee. Luckily, stores like Wegmans and Tops have chosen to charge the fee, donating profits to local food pantries and other charities. Even with the fee, paper bag usage will increase. The problem is that paper bags take up seven times more room than plastic bags, meaning that there are going to be a lot more tractor trailers out on the road. It also takes around 90 percent more resources and energy to produce and recycle paper bags compared to plastic. What will the environmental impact be of increased paper bag use?

• **Home delivery and store pickup:** The convenience of online ordering of grocery items is on the rise, and all items for home delivery or store pickup are packed in paper bags. Could the companies providing these services instead pack them in “return these to us” reusable bags or tubs? This would of course require a sanitization process, among other things, but it would help cut back on non-reusables.

• **Most reusable bags offered in stores are made out of plastic.** While these bags are durable, they’ll eventually end up in landfills. I’d love to see more widespread, affordable availability of cloth bags.

• **There are a number of exemptions where plastic bags are still allowed.** Plastic bags will still be used for items such as pharmaceuticals, produce, and meats. Facilities such as dry cleaners and restaurants can still use plastic bags as well. Why not require those bags to be biodegradable? And why aren’t most grocery stores prominently displaying reusable produce bags? I’ve looked around at my local stores and haven’t seen any.

Despite my concerns, I’m happy that our state has taken this important step toward reducing waste. I hope that it evolves to address concerns I’ve raised – and many that I haven’t. I also hope that we next take aim at companies’ excessive use of plastic packaging, an issue of even greater concern than plastic grocery bags.

The Sierra Club has advocated at all levels – including the Rochester Regional Group – for plastic bag bans. Now that the law is in effect in NYS, perhaps we can shift our focus to the packaging issue – although I’m not sure what we can do about it. If you have any ideas about this, or about improvements to the plastic bag ban that we can advocate for, we’d love to hear from you!

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**NATURALIST’S CORNER**

By Peter Debes  peter8245debes@gmail.com

**Blue Hamlet Fish**

**How Deep is Your Love?**

For the blue hamlet of shallow coral reefs in Florida and the keys, it’s deep. They have both male and female organs! A pair, in mating multiple times, take turns being male and female. Fish exhibit 32 breeding systems, as many as all other vertebrates put together.
NEW PARTNERSHIP WITH GENESEE VALLEY AUDUBON SOCIETY

By Joe Grinnan

The Rochester Regional Group of the Sierra Club is pleased to announce a partnership with the Genesee Valley Audubon Society (GVAS). The mission of the GVAS is to educate and advocate for protection of the environment focusing on birds, wildlife, and habitat. This mission is well within the goals of the Sierra Club. GVAS has agreed to include Sierra Club members on their field trips and nature walks. The current schedule is:

Field Trip to Montezuma Audubon Center 2259 NY-89, Savannah Sunday, March 22, 9:00-11:00am Several species of duck use Montezuma NWR as a stopover during migration. Montezuma Audubon Center will be hosting a guided van tour to see how species we can find. If demand is high enough that we need to carpool behind the van, we will be utilizing conference calling through Sync so everyone can take full advantage of having a tour guide. Bring your own binoculars, if you have them. We have a few to lend, if you don’t. Spotting scopes will be available. Wear appropriate footwear for cold, snow and possible mud. Short walks for better vantage are possible. $20.00 per person to ride in the van. Van seating is limited to nine adults. $15.00 per person to take part in the carpool. Reservation is secured with full payment. Payment in full must be received by Monday, March 16. Questions? Contact Loretta Morrell at 208-6461 or loretta.morrell.gvas@gmail.com.

Nature Stroll, Turning Point Park, 260 Boxart St Monday, April 27, 10:00am-11:00am In celebration of City Nature Challenge 2020 we will use the iNaturalist app on our phones. We will meet in the parking lot at Turning Point Park and enjoy a stroll along the river trail. Trail surface is a combination of tarmac and boardwalk. There is a gradual hill near the parking lot. The remainder of the walk is level. If you prefer to use a camera, feel free. Photos can be uploaded by going to the iNaturalist website. If possible, please have app downloaded onto your phone before meeting up. Questions? Contact Loretta Morrell at 208-6461 or loretta.morrell.gvas@gmail.com.

Nature Stroll, Zoo Road, Durand Eastman Park Tuesday, May 5, 10:00am-11:00am Celebrate winter turning into spring with a easy stroll along a level paved road. Meet at the parking lot situated on the right before the barricades. We’ll be looking for early migrants. Wear comfortable footwear, and bring binoculars, if you have them. Questions? Loretta Morrell 208-6461 or loretta.morrell.gvas@gmail.com.

Mt Hope Cemetery Sunday, May 10, 8:00am Join us at the North Gate of Mt Hope Cemetery for birding and history as we stroll through the older section of the historic cemetery for two hours. The large old trees and bushes along the hillsides are very attractive to migrating birds. Bring your binoculars and $10 for the tour fee. The North Gate is located on Mt Hope Ave. across from Robinson Dr. (This is NOT the gate that is across from The Distillery.) No advance signup is needed. Questions? Contact Joanne Mitchell, (585) 621-1906 or jwmitchell@rochester.rr.com.

April Program Nature Walk along the Brickyard Trail at the Sandra Frankel Nature Park Tuesday, April 28th, 2020, 7:00pm-9:00pm Meet in the front of the Brighton Library Parking Lot, 2300 Elmwood Avenue,14618 A casual evening nature walk to watch for birds and early spring flowers while listening for frogs and other wildlife. This short easy walk of about a mile and a half round trip will give us a chance to explore an urban wetland at dusk. Who know what we will find? We will visit a local restaurant for hot cocoa afterwards.

Please verify any changes to the schedule on the Facebook page of the GVAS or the RRG website at www.sierraclub.org/atlantic/rochester.
Something tragic is happening to our North American birds. In just the past 50 years, since 1970, more than 1 in 4 birds has disappeared across North America, according to research published by the journal, Science.

Familiar and beloved backyard birds are not as abundant as they were 50 years ago. In fact, three billion birds are gone. For example, we’ve lost 1 in 4 blue jays, truly unmistakable birds with bright blue wings and tails and a loud “wake-up” call. Lost are 1 in 3 Baltimore orioles, dressed splendidly with a striking black head on a bright orange body who people love to attract with oranges and jelly. Lost are 1 in 3 dark-eyed juncos, a small gray bird with a white belly and white tail feathers in flight who only visits us in winter.

A 2019 from the National Audubon Society tells a sad story. Of the 604 bird species modeled in their research, climate change puts 389 species at risk of extinction! Scientists used projected range maps to assess each species’ vulnerability to extinction from climate driven shifts in temperature, rainfall, and vegetation.

Sanderlings are small coastal birds that scoot along the sand’s edge as they chase the waves, snapping up tiny prey left behind by the receding water. As the planet warms, rising seas will cover their coastal habitat. The risk level for sanderlings at 1.5 degrees C is a 69% loss of current summer range; 97% loss of current summer range at 3 degrees C warming. Natural buffers rather than sea walls will make coasts more resilient to storms and sea-level rise, and protect shore bird habitat.

The blackburnian warbler migrates through the Rochester area on its way to breed in the northern boreal forests. Its risk level is 54% loss of current summer range at 1.5 degrees C warming; at 3 degrees C warming, the risk level is 99% loss of current summer range. It is essential to protect and create stopover habitat by planting native trees in our communities for this little warbler’s 9,000 mile round trip.

“The loss of birds is not an inexorable process,” says Ken Rosenberg, lead author on the Science study and conservation scientist at the Cornell Lab of Ornithology. “If we take simple actions, we can reverse these bird declines.”

What are these actions? NUMBER ONE: Support policies that lower fossil fuel emissions. Promote renewable energy.

REDUCE LAWN GRASS – more than 60 million acres of lawn in the U.S. offer very little food and shelter for birds and wildlife when native habitat is disappearing. Plant a native berry tree, grow clover which will stay green and provide a free source of nitrogen, love those dandelions for the bees and mow when their bloom period is over.

PLANT NATIVE AVOID PESTICIDES – Household weed killers, such as 2,4-D and glyphosate (Roundup) are toxic to wildlife. Buy organic produce. Nearly 70% of produce sold in the U.S. contains pesticides.

GO FERTILIZER FREE – Synthetic fertilizer takes a huge amount of energy to produce and may provide more nitrogen than the plants need. All natural composted material is best.

BUY ELECTRIC TOOLS – Noisy mowers, hedge trimmers, grass edgers and leaf blowers spew carbon emissions and air pollution. If you don’t have a lawn or garden, commit to one of these actions.

DRINK COFFEE THAT HELPS BIRDS – Three-quarters of the world’s coffee farmers destroy forest habitat to grow coffee in the sun. Migratory birds, like orioles, lose their forest habitat.

PROTECT OUR PLANET FROM PLASTIC – Studies show that at least 80 types of sea birds are known to ingest plastic.

MAKE WINDOWS SAFER FOR BIRDS – Collisions with building windows kill hundreds of millions of birds each year.

KEEP CATS INDOORS – Outdoor cats are a top source of bird loss (second to habitat destruction).

What you do matters. Each of us can make a difference with everyday actions to save birds and our planet.
On February 15, in solidarity with ongoing protests and blockades across North America, local indigenous activists and Extinction Rebellion Rochester (find the group on Facebook) led a rally and march to demand an immediate halt to construction and expansion of the Trans Mountain Pipeline in western Canada and, just as importantly, respect for indigenous sovereignty now being violated by RCMP incursions and other illegitimate exercises of governmental authority.

The march began at Washington Square Park in Rochester and proceeded down Monroe Ave. to a Chase Bank branch at the corner of Goodman St., where a spirited picket took command of the busy intersection for a short time. Chase has been widely targeted because of the corporation’s leading role in providing financing for the pipeline. The chants, banners and posters carried the message: Stop the Ecocide! The Oceans Are Rising and So Are We! Chase: Stop Funding Pipelines!

But an overarching theme came through: Keep It in the Ground!

Extinction Rebellion, now a transcontinental movement after pioneering work in Europe, recognizes a simple but generally ignored fact. If we don’t take drastic, immediate action – concrete steps toward net-zero greenhouse gas emissions by 2025 – we’re doomed. ER demands that governments “must tell the truth by declaring a climate and ecological emergency.” But the movement understands, too, that people and grassroots assemblies must be the real leaders. (Go to http://extinctionrebellion.us)

Sierra Club Rochester Regional Group board member and Haudenosaunee activist Ronald Garrow was among the speakers at the event. Below are his comments:

“The Royal Canadian Mountain Police entered the Wet’suwet’en tribal lands to enforce an injunction authorized by the Canadian Government -- with no legal right to do so. They have attacked and removed indigenous people by force. Peaceful indigenous protestors.

“These protestors were on their own Tribal Lands protesting a pipeline that is being built in tribal homelands without consent. The Native American People across Turtle Island have been dealing with these injustices since First Contact. What is in the best interest of Eurocentric capitalism has always been the motivating factor behind governmental policy.

“Indigenous People have been dealing with oppression and racist governmental policy on our own homelands for 500 years. We have given enough. Native lands have dwindled to less than two percent of North America. Yet pipelines continue to find their way onto tribal lands, as did the railways when they expanded into our traditional homelands, destroying our communities and cultures.

“The United States and Canadian governments enlisted their armies to enforce the colonization and building of railroads into our homelands. In doing so they massacred entire villages, killed our leaders and attacked our food sources, burning crops and killing the buffalo to near extinction.

“Despite these genocidal attacks and ecological destruction upon our people, we have continued to resist the colonizers’ advances onto our territories. It seems fitting that in protest of this undermining of our sovereignty yet again, the Haudenosaunee and the Kanienkehaka (Mohawk) people have shut down the railroad system in Canada until the Pipeline is diverted from tribal lands.”
Kevin Drum, writing in the current issue of Mother Jones, reports that, even with renewable energy fully deployed, it will only furnish 50% of the energy Americans are now using. That means we will have to reduce our energy consumption by half...half the heat, half the AC and half the current number of vehicles on the road. Additionally, those vehicles will need to be restricted to no more than 10,000 miles per year. We will have to do all this if we are to keep global warming below 2 degrees C.

While Mr. Drum’s suggested solution to this thorny problem is a massive transfer of global military spending to a massive investment in scientific R&D focused on GHG reduction, I would like to offer a modest supplement to this worthy proposal. In the post hippie 80s, tiny enclaves of flower children continued to hold out against the “me” generation rise of the yuppie. I lived in one of those enclaves with fourteen other people. While that is a lot of egos under one roof, we had powerful motivation. The minimalists we held didn’t allow for more expenses private accommodations, at least none that left much cash after rent. In our commune, $250 per month plus $25 per week for groceries bought us room and board and the run of a large and beautiful house, utilities included. Each householder, in addition to rent, was responsible for the preparation and cleanup of one dinner for fifteen per week served at 6:00 PM. The large dining room accommodated all of us, plus the occasional guest or two. Dinner conversations were lively and amiable. People came and went all day, but the ample porch and large, comfortable living room usually contained ever changing forums of three or four engaged in discussion, debate, making music or the easy chatter of people simply enjoying each other.

Shopping, cleaning and chores were shared. Each couple or individual had their own room where privacy was respected. No one entered someone else’s quarters without invitation. No property was ever reported missing. There were never more than three motor vehicles in the drive or on the street. People walked, biked or borrowed cars.

There were conflicts, to be sure, but those were, of necessity, settled between parties or, occasionally, in meetings of the household. Generally, we got along pretty well. Communal meals, parties, music and progressive politics kept us on track and together.

This kind of living offers many opportunities for addressing the climate crisis, while providing a richer experience of life at lower cost to the individual and the planet. Let us consider three couples who jointly purchase or rent a 5000 sq. ft. house with six bedrooms. A smaller dwelling might do depending on the needs and budget of the people involved. Let’s suppose that each couple has or is planning to have, two children. It is quite likely that the household expenses could be managed by three or four incomes or some combination of full and part time work. That would leave at least two adults at home to take care of children and housekeeping. These positions might even be rotated to suit personal needs for change and variety. The children would always have the adult supervision and attention that helps them flourish, plus the advantages of of a large family without increasing the population pressure on the planet. Three families would have one mortgage, one utility bill, one water bill and could save money on food by buying bulk. They could get along with two or three vehicles instead of a vehicle for each adult. The energy savings for the household and the planet would be substantial. Three or four incomes might even allow for home solar, wind or geothermal that could make the household energy independent.

There are other advantages in communal living as well. In traditional nuclear families or single parent households, various life stresses can leave little of the parents’ energy for time with their children. A parent may not have access to a spouse’s support because they have also had a trying day. A stressed-out single parent may have no one to turn to but his or her kids. Someone who has had a hard day, is going through a personal crisis or is having an emotional meltdown is more likely to find a sympathetic ear and the attention of a caring peer in a committed household commune. There might even be someone who is particularly good at helping someone in a bad mood or emotional distress. Communal living would also help relieve America’s growing problems with isolation and loneliness which have been shown to affect mental and physical health.

Of course, communal living is not utopia. People are still people. They bicker, they’re crabby, selfish, greedy, stubborn, insensitive, inconsiderate and distant sometimes. But instead of one person trying to figure out what’s going on with their spouse, the emotional load is spread around. Problems can be worked out in community, especially one committed to kindness and compassion. It is harder for two people in conflict to be unfair, disrespectful or abusive with each other in the company of live in mediators. In any situation, living with other people is hard work. But hurt feelings can be avoided and problems resolved if people are determined to find equitable solutions and restore their household to peace and harmony.

You may call me a naive idealist, but I have lived this life and I am still living a scaled down version of it. Besides, this is the way humans lived for thousands of years before we became civilized. We evolved to be cooperative because we needed each other to survive. It is still in our genes. We seldom stop to consider that we are still dependent on each other. Few among us grow all our own food, build and maintain our own homes and sew our own clothes from fabric we also made ourselves. Having doctors and other experts around is also mighty handy. Selfishness has no place in a society that hopes to survive. We still need each other and that means we can’t always have it our way. We submit to laws that restrict our freedom to make life safer, and more equitable for all. We can relearn to give up some of the self for the benefit of the group, the planet...and ultimately the individual, too.

We have a long way to go to regain this level of maturity. We have lived as spoiled children for so long, encouraged by consumer capitalism relentlessly blaring at us through the media, telling us that we can have whatever we want, the way we want it, when we want it, as often as we want it. Now we have a ravished planet and a compromised life support system to show for it. But the media is an extremely powerful tool. We need to reapply all we have learned persuading people to buy stuff, to persuading people to live more simply, share more and to look after each other for the good of the planet and for their own good as well. We have to do this soon. We do not have a lot of time left to grow up before the lights go out on Mother Earth.
ATTEND POPULAR NATURE WALKS BY NATURALIST PETER DEBES

April 17: 7-8:30 PM. **Sounds of the Night - Spring** Lookout Shelter, Mendon Ponds Park. Frogs, toads, owls, coyotes? Children age 12 and up.
Enjoy the age-old rites of Spring as we eavesdrop on frogs, toads, birds, and maybe even coyotes during breeding season at Mendon Ponds Park. We will identify up to five species of frogs and hope for a woodcock, snipe, ducks, geese, and owls. Dress for the weather- we will go even in a very light rain. Waterproof boots essential for mud. Headlamp or flashlight needed. Total distance walking will be about 1 mile on trails. Naturalist Peter Debes. Meets at 7:30 PM at the parking area for the Lookout Shelter on Pond Road. Footwear for muddy spots, and flashlight/headlamp recommended. Cancelled if thunder or heavy rain. Call 585-820-2018 if in doubt.

April 26: 7:30-9 AM **Spring Birds in Washington Grove**. Meet at the kiosk – top of Cobbs Hill Reservoir. Cancelled if raining, or high wind or storm. Naturalist, Peter Debes. Adults and children 12 and older.
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*The opinions expressed in the articles within are those of the authors and are not necessarily an official Sierra Club position or policy.*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Spring 2020 Calendar</th>
<th>SIERRA CLUB and other environmental events</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>DATE</td>
<td>DAY</td>
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<tr>
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<tr>
<td>March 3rd</td>
<td>Tuesday</td>
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<tr>
<td>April 17th &amp; 26th</td>
<td>Friday, Sunday</td>
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<td>Tuesday</td>
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<td>April 22nd</td>
<td>Wednesday</td>
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<td>Tuesday</td>
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<td>Dec.1—May 3rd</td>
<td>Sundays</td>
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<td>Every day</td>
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***Watch our Facebook page and website for information on upcoming community meetings, outings & other activities***

All Committees are local volunteer groups of the Rochester Regional Group of the Sierra Club.

Follow us on Facebook to keep up-to-date on new events throughout the year—www.facebook.com/SierraROC

Executive Committee meetings are open to Sierra Club members. All other meetings are open to everyone.

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