



The Wildlife Watch Binocular

PO Box 532, New Paltz, NY 12561

Fall/Winter 2021-2022

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The Wildlife Watch Binocular is happy to launch its new column. My View starts with Sherry Reisch's article below.

If you are interested in voicing your views on topics related to wildlife and the environment for possible publication, kindly email your view to wildwatch@verizon.net and put "My View" in the subject line.

NEW YORK'S ATTITUDE TOWARD ANIMALS HAS COME A LONG WAY, BUT...

By Sherry Reisch

Those of us New Yorkers who love animals know that our state is not doing all that it can to care for our domestic and wild neighbors. The **Animal Legal Defense Fund** ranks states as to how they treat their resident animals. New York came in as number 32 (out of 50) which is considered the middle tier. As an animal advocate who attends demonstrations and does political work, this was disappointing but not surprising.

I recently picked up the book, "A Traitor to His Species," by Ernest Freeberg. It is the story of **Henry Bergh** and the birth of the animal rights movement. Henry Bergh lived in the mid-1800s to the early 1900s. **He was a champion for horses in a time when there was no outcry over their poor treatment.** At this time, horses were utilized everywhere on the streets of New York City. They were viewed as solely having a utilitarian purpose, as they were the primary mode of trans-

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An Inspiration: GRASSROOT CONSERVATIONIST CHANGED CAREERS TO STOP THE HORRIFIC SNARING OF WILDLIFE

Bindu Gopal Rao



The anti-poaching work that Mat Suraj does in Chhattisgarh, India is changing the region's mentality surrounding snare traps. Chhattisgarh is an area where wildlife is greatly threatened.

Mat Suraj, (also known as M. Suraj), has had a life journey that has been equal parts unexpected, ecological, and humane.

M. Suraj's knowledge of wildlife was once largely restricted to information he learned from National Geographic and Discover television shows. In 2012, his knowledge began to expand far beyond those sources.

"My friend Snehshil Anand invited me to his home on the Madhya Pradesh-Maharashtra border, which adjoins the Pench Tiger Reserve.

This was the first time I learned what a forest looks, feels, and sounds like. This journey brought a new light into my life, and I decided that every year, I would visit a waterfall or at least a protected area."

His studies expanded past his college graduation. He found himself busy studying and preparing for competitive exams, which, if passed, would have landed him a coveted government job. He actively searched for

jobs in which he could work in forests or other protected areas. He said, "I chose Guwahati as the center for my Graduate Aptitude Test in Engineering just so I could visit Kaziranga National Park, and I worked as a preterm lecturer in an engineering college to save money for pursuing my M.Tech." In 2013, however, his life took another turn.

"It was a Sunday. I saw a man on the street striking a huge rat snake with bamboo. This was a common practice in our region at the time. I went to him and pushed him away. I held the rat snake in my hand, but it was already dead. I grieved and cried. I had never felt like that before in my life.

That's when I decided to initiate a wildlife rescue operation and helpline in my city. The helpline became very popular, and we received a lot of calls."

As successful as his wildlife work became, M. Suraj still needed to support himself financially. For this reason, he continued his engineering trajectory and only did rescue work part time. While doing his part time rescue work, M. Suraj said, "I came across local NGOs, (non-governmental organizations) like Nova

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Nature Welfare Society, Chhattisgarh Wildlife Society, and national NGOs like Wildlife Trust of India, otherwise known as WTI. They helped me with conducting wildlife conservation related activities. They also helped me to understand the wildlife issues which affected the state.”

In 2016, Alok Tiwari, a forest department officer of the Indian Forest Service, asked M. Suraj if he wanted to spend the next six months conducting a tiger-monitoring program. After much thought, Suraj resigned from the college, packed his bag and headed straight to Boramdeo Wildlife Sanctuary in Chhattisgarh to start work.

“I was guided by some of the best mentors like Moiz Ahmed, (experienced wildlife conservationist in Chhattisgarh) and Krishnendu Basak (project manager at WTI), who taught me everything about tigers and how to monitor them.”

After this stint, Suraj gained an opportunity to conduct the Phase IV Tiger Monitoring Program at Udanti Sitanadi Tiger Reserve (USTR) from November 2016 until September 2017. While this was an exciting opportunity, he faced many obstacles. He said, “This reserve suffers due to political unrest and the unwillingness of politicians to work towards conservation. If one wants to conserve wildlife, one needs to address both issues. There are 99 villages inside of this tiger reserve. That is a lot of biotic pressure on the land and yet the sparse wildlife that does live here is thriving.”

Wildlife was not populous in the area, but Suraj was able to observe whatever wildlife there was via hidden cameras. He said, “At that time there were only two tigers present in the region, a male and female. The cameras frequently captured the male tiger. My team and I were very fond of him.”

After a devastating personal experience, Suraj soon found that the reason that the tiger population was so low on the reserve was due to tiger poaching. He explained “In 2018 we were working in the field when we heard that police confiscated the skin of a huge male tiger. We were worried and hoped that it was not the male tiger that we had been observing on our cameras. To our dismay, however, it was.” The whole team was grief stricken and they worked hard over the next few months to collect evidence related to the poaching of this beloved tiger. This quest was unsuccessful as Suraj proclaimed “All of this work did not bring the tiger back and the culprits are still free and uncharged.”

His cameras were useful in detecting other problems in the reserve. He captured several images of people with snares who had killed animals for their body parts. In an attempt to address this issue, he applied to Wildlife Trust of India (WTI) for the ‘Rapid Action Projects’ (RAP) program on a pilot basis, for a small region of the tiger reserve.

“I am grateful to WTI and David Shepherd Wildlife Foundation who provided financial support to the project. Within a span of six months, we had conducted a project with the state forest department and local communities to collect snares from the study area. We had identified some 300 locations where snares were usually deployed, and we confiscated numerous snares/traps that target species ranging from small hares to large ones like sambar and spotted deer.”



Further action was needed to remedy the poaching problem. The villagers of this remote location needed to be educated on the topic of poaching. They were primarily poaching to earn money from selling wildlife or its parts to support their families. “We needed to work in building opportunities like livelihood generation, research on various socio-economic aspects and sustainable agriculture to improve their living standards. I have been working on this for the last eight years, but I believe these efforts are just the tip of the iceberg and a lot is required to be done.”

Now, Suraj is an expert in doing anti-snare walks where he involves both local communities and forest front-line staff to search for snares placed by poachers in the suspected areas. This helps in getting rid of the snares and there is also an exchange of knowledge between locals and the forest department. He is obliged to Pankaj Talwar, DFO of Mahasamund Forest Division, Chattisgarh for his support from the forest department’s side.

“In our past study, we had targeted three ranges of the Udanti Sitanadi Tiger Reserve including Core 1 (North and South Udanti Ranges) and a buffer (Kulhadighat Range). Walks were conducted for two days per week, across 36 beats of the target area during four months of study session. Several snares, ranging from small hare traps to larger clutch wire snares were confiscated.

We have also found mouth bombs - a type of bomb that explodes when an animal bites into it, killing the

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animal. About 300 locations were identified where people used to deploy snares for hunting and the team assisted the forest department in confiscation of those snares.”

Many poachers are very skilled at the activity and adamant about continuing it because it financially supports themselves and their families. They look for regions where the chances of capturing wildlife are higher. “Our team too tries to target wildlife-rich areas. We also enlist locals who have previously been involved in poaching, and so get access to their deep knowledge about locations/sites used by poachers for deploying snares. We also try to make this a part of day-to-day patrolling activities in which the forest staff walks about 3 to 6 miles searching for both animal signs and snares and dismantling or destroying the snares they find.”

Obtaining funding is a great challenge for wildlife conservations. Knowing this, Suraj applied to “The Habitat Trust’s Grants Programme. He found great success when his project was selected for the Conservation Hero Grant in 2020. Rushikesh Chavan, who heads The Habitats Trust said, “we selected M. Suraj through a rigorous five-stage process that considered the expected impact, relevance and scalability of his project; his capacity to deliver and finally the long-term sustainability of his proposed work past the one-year grant period. Suraj is working on anti-poaching initiatives in various parts of Chhattisgarh where wildlife is greatly threatened. He has a deep connection with the communities living alongside wildlife, who are among the most im-



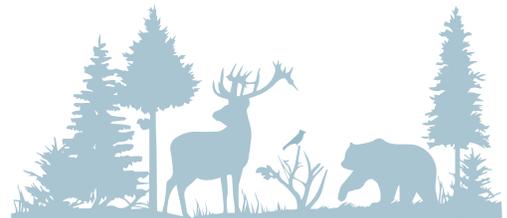
Indian Tiger, Photo Credit: Hans Veth www.unsplash.com

portant stakeholders for long-term conservation action. “The grant (roughly about \$13,675) will be utilized for implementation of the project over the Barnawapara Wildlife Sanctuary Udanti Sitanadi Tiger Reserve landscape. “The project is in its initial phase and we should be able to share outcomes soon,” says Suraj.

Looking ahead, Suraj plans to conduct systematic scientific studies on a few rare and endangered species that are found in the tiger reserve but are low in numbers. These species include the mouse deer, the rusty spotted cat, and the Asian small clawed otter. If necessary, captive breeding programs for these species may also be considered. “Simultaneously, I plan to develop livelihood alternatives that may benefit local communities and help reduce their poaching activities. All this work needs a lot of financial support and a dedicated team. Currently, I have a good team and I am trying to secure financial support. I am continuing whatever I can do, with a hope that we will get to continue this work and scale it up.” Certainly, this effort deserves much help.

To reach Mat Suraj, please contact on +919993454757 or email: mat.suraj@gmail.com

Bindu Gopal Rao is a freelance writer and photographer based in Bengaluru. She has a special interest in the environment. She enjoys birdwatching and looking for local and unusual stories in any destination. You can follow her on Instagram [@bindugopralao](https://www.instagram.com/bindugopralao) and view her work on www.bindugopalrao.com



WILDLIFE WATCH 877WILDHELP

Wildlife Watch needs your help more than ever to continue providing our vital wildlife hotline service to the public. We receive calls from across the country, and occasionally from Canada, from people needing help with injured and orphaned wildlife.

Our easy to remember number 877WILDHELP is recommended by veterinary offices, SPCAs, and law enforcement agencies.

Additionally, we publish the Wildlife Watch Binocular to inform the public about environmental impacts on wild animals, to highlight people who help them, to promote wildlife watching, and to engender understanding that all animals are individuals deserving of compassionate treatment.

Wildlife Watch maintains current lists of wildlife rehabilitators around the country. Our hotline helps us to help hundreds of people and animals annually.

Please help us by becoming a Wildlife Watch member for \$35 annually.

Please make an additional contribution for the R.O.C.K. Project that will be put into a fund and used to help a rehabber help wild animals. R.O.C.K. Project funds will be distributed at our discretion up to the amount available.

You can contribute by

PayPal by clicking here:
www.wildwatch.org/contribute/

✓ Contribute by phone with a credit card. 845-256-1400

✓ Contribute by mail:
Wildlife Watch, P.O. Box 562,
New Paltz, NY 12561



NEW YORK'S ATTITUDE TOWARD ANIMALS HAS COME A LONG WAY, BUT... *Cont'd from Page 1*

portation. They were also used for other menial tasks and were often neglected and abused.

Bergh's name is famously associated with horse protection, but surprisingly, the book illustrates Bergh's fight against the shocking abuse of sea turtles, which were a popular dish until the early 1970s. You can imagine my disgust when I read about the way turtles were treated in the late 19th century in New York. Turtle soup was very popular then. **Sea turtles were often transported to New York via ships from overseas. The voyage to New York took weeks. During this time the turtles were deprived of water and food. The turtles were large and heavy and were stacked on top of each other. In order to prevent the turtles from moving about, they were flipped upside down and bound together with a rope that was pierced through their flippers. Often the punctured limbs would become infected.**

The gelatinous "green fat" under the turtle's shell was also a delicacy at the time. The green turtle was known to grow as large as five hundred pounds, or double that!



[Photo: https://www.fws.gov/refuge/james_campbell/wildlife_and_habitat/green_turtle.html]

Hunters used nets and spears to capture these migratory turtles. If a female was on shore to lay eggs, she would either be taken and butchered right there, or sent on the long journey to New York. Men joined "turtle clubs" to engage in the eating of turtles. Each course of the meal would include turtle flesh of some kind. One can only imagine the pain, suffering and deprivation inflicted on these innocents. Is there no boundary that humans will cross when it comes to the exploitation of their wild cousins?

I was shocked and saddened, and I could feel their pain and suffering. I am glad that turtle soup and turtle meat is no longer popular fare in New York City.

In response to the poor treatment of turtles and horses, (amongst other animals), Henry Bergh climbed an uphill mountain to create and build his New York based organization: The American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals. By doing so, he has made a major difference in our state, but we still have a long way to go.

Those of us who care need to continue to point out cruelty and keep pushing our government to protect vulnerable animals from indifference, exploitation, and cruelty.

Although the turtles that ended up in our restaurants were the



Photo by Sherry Reisch of turtles at Central Park

giant sea turtles, I am always reminded of them when I take my morning walk in Central Park. I never fail to stop by the pond to look at turtles as they swim about or bask in the sunlight for warmth. It is a very calming scene and enjoyable.

Sherry Reisch is on the board of the League of Humane Voters® (LOHV®) and is the New York chapter's Wildlife Policy Liaison.

Editors Note:

Did you know that snapping turtles and frogs can still be hunted in NYS? See here: <https://www.dec.ny.gov/outdoor/31339.html>

That government publication says: *A fishing or hunting license is required to take frogs with a spear, club, hook, or by hand. A hunting license is required to take frogs with a gun or bow.*

They even provide a way to eat the turtles while cautioning about the health risks for doing so!



ARE YOU INTERESTED IN HELPING WITH ACADEMIC RESEARCH ON THE VOCALIZATIONS OF THE GREAT HORNED OWL?

If so, please contact **Dr. Craig Perdue** at cperdue@shadowsspeak.org

You can take a look his website: www.shadowsspeak.org

Dr. Perdue is particularly interested in working with wildlife rehabilitators.

HOW TO MAKE FRIENDS WITH A SHOEBILL STORK: JUST BOW!



<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6d13Ltrj1jo>

In September, Wildlife Watch had a call from a man in East Fishkill, NY:

He said, *This may sound unbelievable, but I'm reporting something that was the most frightening experience I've ever had in my life...I was driving home late from work and there was a large figure standing in the middle of the road, so I slowed down, but it wouldn't move out of the way. I couldn't make out what it was, so I drove slowly around the figure until we were at eye level with each other. I've never been so frightened in my life. Standing there was a huge, hairy creature with an enormous bill and piercing eyes. Later, I looked it up and discovered that it was a shoebill stork, and that there were only 5 in the US, and they are from Africa.*



Wildlife Watch found that the shoebill can be 5 feet tall and have a wingspan of about 8 feet. They make a sound by clacking their bill together quickly. It sounds like a loud submachine gun being fired off.

We thought it was fortunate that the shoebill didn't make that sound as the caller was driving past him.

You can watch a variety of YouTube videos by using the keywords "shoebill stork."

The caller added that shoebills eat small alligators, and that an alligator had been sighted at a school playground in East Fishkill, NY. You can see the news article about it here: <https://outsider.com/outdoors/new-york-officials-catch-alligator-poughkeepsie-junior-high-school/>

Wildlife Watch called the DEC, assuming they would have the resources to find the bird and transport him to a warmer climate. Surely, he wouldn't survive a New York winter. In our research to find out more about this unusual and adorable bird we discovered several videos that explained the shoebill protocol for introducing himself to you and what he expects in return. To be his friend, you must bow and shake your head when he does. If you do that several times, he will know you are friendly and will even let you pet him. Unfortunately, many of the YouTube videos we've seen are of confined shoebills, but other reports of them in the wild seem to confirm that they do bow and expect you to bow to them.

The DEC said this man's sighting was the only one they knew about and that the shoebill had probably flown off.

So, if you ever encounter a shoebill don't be alarmed, just bow!

Then try to get him to safety. They're rare with about three thousand left in the wild due to hunting and other manmade causes.

(To see a shoebill's bowing greeting, watch <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-p2RyFnudDw>)



ALLIGATOR CAUGHT AT JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOL IN EAST FISHKILL

An alligator was found on the grounds of a high school in East Fishkill about the same time the shoebill was reported to Wildlife Watch.



Photo credit: www.unsplash.com

The caller connected the two occurrences because shoebills eat small alligators and he felt someone had released them together. **Note: Owning an alligator can be a violation of law.**

The police were called for the alligator and they, in turn, contacted the NYS DEC. A conservation officer arrived who had experience with alligators and placed a towel over his eyes and taped his mouth shut.

Wildlife Watch had hoped for a better placement, but found out that, sadly, the alligator was taken to an entertainment zoo in Pennsylvania.

R.O.C.K. - Rehabbers Offer Care and Kindness

The Wildlife Watch Hotline – 877-WILDHELP receives hundreds of calls every year from across the country, and a few from Canada. Police departments, conservation agencies, SPCAs, veterinary offices, and federal, state, and municipal offices have referred callers to

Wildlife Watch for help.

Your contribution to Wildlife Watch will help us to expand our volunteer service by allowing us to cover phones 24/7 and update our lists as new wildlife rehabilitators come on the scene.

IN MEMORIAM - MISSY RUNYAN August 26,1970 – October 6, 2021

Founder - Friends of the Feathered and Furry Wildlife Center (FFF)

We were shocked and extremely saddened to learn of Missy's sudden passing. She was only 51 and had many more years to continue her noble work of helping animals return to the wild after experiencing injury or after being orphaned.

Wildlife Watch will never forget Missy for her willingness to take most species, and for her organizational prowess that reached out to a variety of people, including dog wardens, law enforcement officers, volunteers, and sanctuaries.

Missy was often Wildlife Watch's "go-to" rehabber when we needed quick information to help a caller from a remote area or in a state that had very few rehabbers. We have found that callers are often willing to directly help the wild animals they find – at least temporarily – but they need to be advised of the right way to handle the animal, and the appropriate food until they can get the little patient to a trained rehabilitator. Missy always knew the answers.

The Barred Owl Release

One of my most memorable experiences was when Missy called me one day several years ago to say that she was going to release a Barred owl in New Paltz after he had spent weeks in rehabilitation at FFF. The New Paltz dog warden, Kevin Hindman, who had found the owl, was going to be there, too. I felt honored that she asked if I wanted to be there for the release.



Of course I did! Missy was already there, bird in arm, when I arrived.

The bird was alert and clearly ready to be returned to God's care. Missy found the exact spot where she wanted to set him free. I was standing fairly close and witnessed Missy whispering to him. It seemed like a prayer. Then she kissed his head and softly said, "Stay safe." With that, she thrust her arm upward and he flew to the top of a high tree, looked down for a minute or so, and then soared out of sight. It was an emotional moment for everyone who witnessed it, and one that Missy likely experienced many times in her rehab career.

How We Met

Many years ago, after Wildlife Watch started the hotline, I received a call from a woman in NYC who needed to find a home for a wild caught cockatoo who had been given to her.

Although she loved the bird, the bird hated her. In fact, she said the bird hated women in general.

Yes, he liked men and loved her husband, but to stay alive, she needed to find another home for him. His name was Reggie.

I called many rehabbers to no avail as cockatoos are exotics and not within the purview of wildlife rehabilitators. Finally, I came across Missy's name in the listings. She asked if anything was wrong with him. "No," I said, but warned

her that the cockatoo didn't like women. Missy was up for the challenge. So, she and her husband, David, met us at a park-and-ride where we transferred Reggie to their care. As reported, Reggie would take any opportunity to attack Missy, though he was very sweet with her husband.

Obviously, it was disrupting Missy's work as she had to dodge him every day. Finally, using her matchmaking skills, Missy found the perfect person to give Reggie a loving home. A man who volunteered at FFF Wildlife Center, and lived alone, enthusiastically offered to take Reggie. He had gotten to know Reggie and there were good feelings between the two of them. Needless to say, Missy was very happy for Reggie, and no doubt happy that she didn't have to dodge his attacks. **Wildlife Watch is happy to report that David will be continuing Missy's crucial work.**

Visit FFF at <https://www.facebook.com/fffwildlifecenter/> or contact them at: www.fffwildlifecenter.com or email: info@fffwildlifecenter.com



LET'S GO WILDLIFE WATCHING

MORIKAMI GARDENS Palm Beach

Report and photos by Chris Arenella

Once a settlement of Japanese immigrants, Morikami Gardens is a place of many stories.

The small group of settlers farmed the land amidst the harshness of 100-degree Floridian weather and millions of mosquitos. They also did this without the aid of machinery. **George Morikami** survived and prospered, and in 1976 he donated his 200 acres to Palm Beach County. Sadly, he died just one year after the groundbreaking began.

Morikami is a place of tranquility. You'll find bamboo groves, Zen gardens for meditation, lakes, wooden bridges, and stone Buddhas, as well as a permanent Bonsai exhibit. Koi fish and turtles can be seen in the lakes, as well as a resident alligator, who is often in the same spot at the shallow end of the lake.

I live nearby and visit Morikami just to watch the wildlife. Unlike many people in Florida, I marvel at the sight of a green iguana. Many green iguanas call Morikami home, even though they are not native to Florida. Unfortunately, they were pets whose owners let them go when they got too large, (much like the pythons of the Everglades).



Many iguanas are unfairly vilified and killed in Florida, although irresponsible pet owners are to blame.

They look like mini dinosaurs. While iguanas are known to be green, they have many different colors, as seen in my photo.



Though their appearance can be daunting, they are pacifists who prefer to dine on vegetation. Hibiscus, I hear, is their favorite food.

Another resident of Morikami is the Great Blue Heron. The Great Blue Heron is a wading bird and is a wondrous sight when they take flight. They glide quietly with a wingspan of six feet. The photo to

the left is one that I took of a Great Blue on a rock at the water's edge. The clouds are reflected in the water which gives the impression that the heron is on a precipice. Thankfully, the Great Blue Heron is protected by the Migratory Bird Treaty Act.

If you are ever in the Palm Beach area, and in need of relaxation, and want to feel in touch with wildlife and nature, then Morikami Gardens is a must visit!

Chris Arenella has rescued many animals. She loves being in nature and the peace it brings.



WATCH OUT FOR WILDLIFE WHEN DRIVING

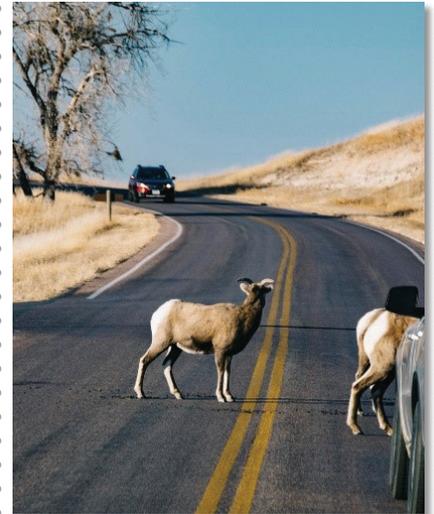


Photo Credit: Sandra Seitamaa on www.unsplash.com

How many times have you heard someone respond to a driver who hit a deer on the road, "OMG, I hope your car is ok!" What? Not a shred of sympathy for the deer? That's right.

It was refreshing to read *How to Avoid a Deer Collision* by Andrew Sheldon show concern for wildlife.

Mr. Sheldon wrote: *Deer are more active in the fall months, increasing the likelihood of encountering them on the road. **Here's how to keep you and the animals out of harm's way...***

Visit: <https://magazine.northeast.aaa.com/daily/life/cars-trucks/how-to-avoid-a-deer-collision/>

BLACK TERN (*CHILDONIAS NIGER*)



Barry Kent MacKay is a Canadian bird artist. His delightful paintings are always accompanied by unusual facts such as the one below that will make your day!

Barry wrote: The bird on the left is preening, scratching his ear with his foot while using wings to balance himself. Most bird species do this, since they obviously can't reach their ear with the beak, which is normally used in preening, but each species does so exclusively in one of two ways that are called "direct" and "indirect". The direct method involves the foot going directly to the ear under the wing. The indirect method involves foot going over the wing, often with the wing drooped, which assists balance. Apparently each species does one way or the other but not both, and a few years ago as I was sketching and photographing Black Terns at Nonquon sewage lagoons near Lake Skugog, Port Perry – a great place to see Black Terns – I saw this behaviour – direct ear scratching. If you are ever asked if Black Terns are direct or indirect ear scratchers, you now know!

Please contact Barry with any other question you may have about any bird, anywhere!

Barry Kent MacKay,
mimus@sympatico.ca

Purchase, print, product info:
<https://fineartamerica.com/profiles/barry-mackay>



**NEED HELP FOR
INJURED OR
ORPHANED WILDLIFE?**



**Call the
wildlife watch hotline!**

**1-877-WILDHEL(P)
(1-877-945-3435)**

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Anne Muller, *Editor*
We welcome letters, articles, and
photos for consideration.

Contributions are tax-deductible.

How to investigate animal
cruelty in New York State

<https://www.nyshumane.org/manual-table-of-contents/>