



fair game, fowl play

FOR THOSE WHO THINK birding is a humdrum sport meant only for the patient, think again. This September, birding becomes competitive at the Montezuma Wetlands Complex during the 11th annual Montezuma Muckrace. Organized by the Friends of the Montezuma Wetlands Complex and Audubon New York, the muckrace is a competition for birders of all ages that raises money for conservation at the new Montezuma Audubon Center. Pledges are made for each bird species the team spots. Winning teams receive prizes.

"This is a chance to get out in one of the premier birding sites in New York and have fun while learning from others," says Jillian Liner, one of the event's planners. "It's a great chance to spot some of the rarest bird species out there."

The Wetlands Complex, a 34,000-acre refuge located in Cayuga, Wayne, and Seneca counties, is a migration point for an array of birds. Last year's winning team spotted 146 species. The complex serves as one of the nation's most important sites for conservation activity and research.

Project coordinators plan to put the funds toward computer kiosks at the Montezuma Audubon Center where birders will be able to enter their sightings on eBird.org, a nationwide,

user-created database that tracks species and gives conservationists an understanding of bird populations.

Last year, the event raised \$9,302, which funded habitat studies of the Cerulean Warbler, a vulnerable species whose population is decreasing faster than any other warbler in the country. "It was the biggest amount raised yet. This year's goal is \$10,000," Liner says.

"We are also going to put together a guide of other places to bird in addition to places to eat and stay for people who aren't familiar with this region," Liner adds. "It's a chance for us to help encourage eco-tourism for participants from out of this area."

The muckrace takes place Sept. 7 to 8. Registration ends Aug. 10. Competitive teams must have three or more people. The registration fee for competitive teams is \$100 and for youth and recreational teams is \$50.

"This event is very unique since it is in the fall. Most birding competitions are in the spring when species are plentiful," Liner says. "This is definitely more of a challenge, but Montezuma is known to provide great birding year-round."

For more info and registration, visit www.friendsofmontezuma.org.

« SARA ROBERTSON »

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Contra Dancing

If you'd rather show up once in a while with no preparation and only a little rhythm, contra dancing could be your bag.

There's almost always a live band, says Ted Crane, founder of the Tompkins County Country Dances. His group gets together most Fridays at the Bethel Grove Community Center.

Contra shares its roots with traditional square dancing, but the caller tells you what to do beforehand. "You've got to be in the right place at the right time, but how you get there is your business, as long as you don't run into anyone," Crane says.

Contra dancing is getting increasingly popular, especially among younger people. "Contra is more forgiving of the antics of youngsters than others," he says. And you don't have to wear a silly costume.

www.tedcrane.com

Morris Dancing

Morris dancing is too old to figure out where the name came from. Even Shakespeare called it ancient, says Susan Galbraith, squire of the Bassett Street Hounds in Syracuse.

"You can't do it without smiling," she says. "What could be sillier than a bunch of adults hopping around wearing colorful rags?"

The music is always acoustic and depends on what instruments are available. It's accompanied by dancers jingling bells strapped to their calves, clashing sticks together, and singing questionably mature lyrics including, "My friend Billy's got a 10-foot willie, and he showed it to the girl next door."

"If you can fog a mirror, you can learn to Morris," Galbraith says. In preparation for their dozen or so yearly performances, the Hounds practice every Monday from 7 to 8:30 p.m. at the Westcott Community Center. If the weather's nice, they'll be in the parking lot. You can't miss them.

www.bassettv-hounds.org

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