

December 9 from 1 to 3 P.M. at Tackapausha Museum & Preserve on Washington Ave. in Seaford.

At approximately 2 P.M., Theodore Roosevelt Sanctuary & Audubon Center will present a live raptor program. Children will get a chance to look at these beautiful creatures and learn many enlightening facts.



Light refreshments will be served. A table with informative brochures will be available for adults (who will also be entranced by the raptors).

The museum's usual admission of \$2 for adults and \$1 for children (ages 4 to 14; free for younger children) will be charged.

To volunteer to help, please contact me at 221-3921 or tklwings@optonline.net.

CHRISTMAS BIRD COUNT PARTICIPANTS INVITED

SSAS's Wendy Murbach has answered a plea to be the team leader for the Northern Nassau Christmas Bird Count (CBC) quadrant that includes Planting Fields Arboretum in Oyster Bay. This CBC is run by North Shore and Huntington Audubon Societies (the Southern Nassau CBC is several decades older than SSAS and, due to circumstances beyond our control, is not organized by us). If you're interested in participating (for the usual CBC fee of \$5), contact Wendy at Wmrbch@aol.com or 546-6303. The **Saturday, December 23** count will begin around 8 A.M. and continue through the day, but you can join it after lunch (ask for Wendy's cell phone number in order to locate her team).

 **BIRD WALKS** 
 Elliott Kutner

All walks start at 9:30 A.M. except for Pelham Bay; no walk if it rains or snows or temperature is below 25°F. Any questions? Call Elliott at 486-7667. Directions and summaries may be found at ssaudubon.org.

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| Nov. 26 | Pelham Bay for Owls [pull over to street on extreme right after going through Throgs Neck Bridge toll (Pennyfield Ave.); meet at 9 A.M.; hiking shoes recommended] |
| Dec. 3 | Zach's Bay Parking Field #4, N.E. corner |
| Dec. 10 | Massapequa Preserve (LIRR N.E. lot) |
| Dec. 17 | Jones Beach West End #2, N.E. corner |
| Dec. 24 | <i>Season's Greetings — No Walk</i> |
| Dec. 31 | <i>Happy New Year — No Walk</i> |
| Jan. 7 | Massapequa Preserve (LIRR N.E. lot) |
| Jan. 14 | Jones Beach West End #2, N.E. corner |
| Jan. 21 | Jamaica Bay Wildlife Refuge |
| Jan. 28 | Hempstead Lake State Park (Exit 18, first lot south of Southern State Parkway, south end of lot) |
| Feb. 4 | Pelham Bay (9 A.M.; see above) |

WELCOME NEW MEMBERS

Wendy Murbach

One of the wonderful perks that you get from an Audubon membership is the chance to be a part of your local Audubon chapter, South Shore Audubon Society.

You are automatically a valued member of this active and friendly chapter, so please come out to the next meeting at the Freeport Library from 7:30–9:30 P.M. on the second Tuesday of the month to hear what you can do to help preserve your local environment's health and viability, to hear about local issues that you can help to solve, and to see an interesting program.

Whether you are a beginning birder or someone with a large life list, you will enjoy our weekly Sunday bird walks led by Elliott Kutner, birder extraordinaire. Check out the special events that are mentioned in this *Skimmer*. Attend them yourself, and bring your family and friends too.

You are warmly invited to be an active participant in this vibrant all-volunteer organization comprised of persons who, like you, care about the earth we live on, about our local environment, and about the creatures that live alongside us.

Our new members since the last *Skimmer* are:

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|------------------------|---|
| Bethpage | Theodore Cisek |
| Cedarhurst | Helen Pollack |
| East Meadow | Cecilia Barbier, J. Marcus, Irene Z. Schwartz |
| Elmont | Melissa Chamberlin, Dulcie Parris |
| Floral Park | Mr. William J. Cassidy |
| Garden City | Suzanne Burston |
| Hempstead | M. Cavoli |
| Hewlett | Kenneth Liao |
| Hicksville | Mrs. Jane Gersch, Ronni Nichemin & Maria Polanas |
| Island Park | Michael G. McGinry |
| Levittown | Francis Higgins, Janice M. Littell, Mr. Charles Monell, Mrs. Isabel Sulsona |
| Long Beach | Cheryl Reich, Mr. Alan Thommasson |
| Lynbrook | Carol Donaldson, Mr. Angelo Vaia |
| Massapequa | Ms. Virginia Kollman, Philip Platzer |
| Massapequa Park ... | Ms. Susan Carlough |
| Plainview | Ms. Denise Shibilski |
| Rockville Centre | Seymour Albus, Carolyn Klotz, Bob Scherer |
| Seaford | Anthony Cappello |
| Stewart Manor | Arthur Boddicker |
| Valley Stream | Peter Bauer, Harold D. Berger, Laurie Golan, Clifford Williams |
| Wantagh | Harvey Brody, Trish Milos |



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NATURE TALES FROM A WANDERER
Hermit Thrush

Joe Grupp

A strong gust of wind blew a gathering of leaves across the parking field as I approached the car after a morning of counting birds. The moving leaves were spread out in such a manner that each leaf was separated from the next by a rather large space, yet hundreds of leaves passed by in the short period of time that the wind gust lasted. Each leaf, as it tumbled along the parking field, produced an individual crackly, pleasant sound that, combined with the similar sound from the hundreds of other leaves, was almost musical. The leaves momentarily pulled my thoughts away from the Hermit Thrush as well as the other birds that we counted as we gathered data during a Research Committee survey.

We had observed a total of five Hermit Thrushes that day. Some of the observations were of high quality, others less so. One bird flushed from the woodland floor and landed on a thin branch at about our eye level and not too far in front of us. Perched on the branch with its back toward us, it was in perfect position for studying the dull brown upper parts and the deep rusty reddish tail. It perched there with its wings drooping as thrushes' wings do. At times it raised its tail, then let it drop back down slowly.



At another location, a Hermit Thrush flushed to a low branch in a shrub, presenting us with a partial side view. This view made the color difference between back and tail more subtle, which demanded more concentration for it to be observed. Its position provided an opportunity to study the bird's dull eye ring and some of the brown spots on the grayish-white to white breast and underparts. A careful observation of the brown spots found them to be in the shape of an inverted V.

Not all of the Hermit Thrush observations were ideal for study purposes. Some allowed only a quick glance at a bird as it flushed or flew before us and then went into the brush or to another location. That gave us just a few split seconds to pick up the field marks necessary for its identification. Others were in poor light and/or partly hidden by branches or leaves.

Hermit Thrushes are early migrants in the spring as they head for the coniferous and mixed forest habitats to the north. They are late migrants in the fall. A few may breed on eastern Long Island and the North Shore, and occasionally, if the winter is mild, a few may be found here during the winter months. They are the only brown-backed thrush that winters in the United States. The brown-backed thrushes include the Wood Thrush, Veery, Swainson's Thrush, etc.

A check of the weekly data that we have collected at this location found evidence of the fall migration of Hermit Thrushes passing through. In late September one Hermit Thrush was recorded and in the first two weeks of October

there was another one. Then, in the last two weeks of October and the first two of November, the numbers of Hermit Thrushes observed were 13, 20, 12, and the count day's 5, respectively. On the day of our survey and observations, there were still some leaves left on the trees waiting to fall and to be blown by yet another gusty wind, and I expected to find a few more Hermit Thrushes in the weeks after the survey, but all the signs seemed to indicate that fall and the Hermit Thrush migration were winding down.

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BIRDSEED THANKS AND AVAILABILITY

If you're interested in purchasing some of the birdseed packages and suet cakes that were offered at our sale on November 5, please contact the SSAS prez at mssperling@optonline.net or 221-3921 to find out what we have.

We greatly appreciate the efforts of the members who volunteered at the sale. Special thanks go to the ever-dedicated Paul Butkereiit for organizing the seed sale from his hospital bed, and to Joe Grupp and Bill Hollweg for the extra work they did before and during the sale. We also thank Joan Butkereiit, Raymond Conn, Bruce Elkin, Dolores Grupp, Marilyn Hametz, Joe Landesberg, Therese Lucas, Steve Schellenger, Mike Sperling, and John Zarudsky.

SHOP AT OUR ONLINE NATURE MALL



Our Web site, ssaudubon.org, contains a link to the Online Nature Mall, which automatically gives a percentage of your purchases (10%) to SSAS if you visit the site using our link.

The mall is a division of the Thayer Birding Software company. There are over 11,000 products available in the Birds Shop (containing field guides, audio CDs, CD-ROMs, and books on attracting birds), Nature Shop, Gift Shop, Feeder Shop, Gardening Shop, @Home Shop, Binocular Shop, Kids Shop, and Ecology Shop.

OURE-LIST http://groups.yahoo.com/group/ssas_list

RARE BIRD ALERT (212) 979-3070

AUDUBON MEMBERSHIP STATUS (800) 274-4201

"It has been a rather concerted effort and resoundingly successful. By providing numerous methods of submitting comments — including comment cards, rack cards, writing on butcher paper at the scoping sessions, sending in letters, and emailing issues via the park's website — we heard a vast array of opinions. The official close of public scoping will be *January 12, 2007*. But, rest assured that there will be many more opportunities for public input as this process moves forward.

"Fire Island National Seashore hosted a series of public scoping meetings during July, August, and September this year. The purpose of the meetings was twofold. First, we wanted to get the word out that we are developing a new general management plan for the park (the last one was completed in 1977). Second, we wanted to encourage members of the public to share their thoughts and concerns about present and future conditions and activities at Fire Island National Seashore.



"During the summer months, public open houses were held on Fire Island at Ocean Beach, Davis Park, Sailors Haven, Watch Hill, Cherry Grove, Fire Island Pines, Saltaire, and Lighthouse Beach. In September, three additional open houses were held on Long Island at Mastic Beach, Patchogue, and Stony Brook [announced via SSAS's e-list, since there wasn't time to get the word out via the *Skimmer*]. Over 400 members of the public participated in these sessions, including many representatives of local government, special interest groups, and other organizations.

"The types of issues raised varied widely. We learned that in general, there was broad public support for the National Seashore in both its resource management efforts and public programs. Many meeting participants expressed an interest in seeing a greater NPS ranger presence and more visitor programs. We also learned that there was quite a bit of confusion on the part of the public about how the communities and the National Seashore relate to one another — particularly in the "who's responsible for what" department. This was particularly true when discussing the good, the bad, and the ugly about boardwalks.

"Concerns about coastal erosion, deer, mosquitoes, and invasive species dominated the comments relative to resource management. Vehicular access — both for and against — was the focus of numerous comments from many varying interests including contractors, year-round and part-time residents, and recreational drivers. Access to beaches for disabled visitors was also highlighted as a concern. Another issue noted was the scale and quality of development within the communities.

"Not surprisingly, at some locations certain topics took considerable precedence over others. For instance, at Sailors Haven and Watch Hill, the vast majority of comments focused on the operation and condition of the marinas and associated facilities (e.g., showers). At Lighthouse Beach, a substantial number of people turned

out in support of continued clothing optional use of the beach in that area."

At the November 11 semiannual meeting of the Long Island Audubon Council, we approved a letter to be sent to Senator Clinton, Senator Schumer, and Congressman Bishop that reads as follows (plus a "Dear" and a "Very truly yours"):

"I am writing on behalf of the Long Island Audubon Council, which includes the seven separate Audubon chapters, representing over 6000 members from all parts of the area.

"As you know, NPS [the National Park Service] has recently commenced the revision of its General Management Plan (GMP) for the Fire Island National Seashore, which will establish the guidelines for administration of the area for the next several decades.

"In 1980, the United States Congress authorized the inclusion of a 7 mile stretch of Fire Island in the National Wilderness Preservation System. The existence of a primitive barrier beach environment within 60 miles of Times Square was itself remarkable, and the area remains the only Federal wilderness in New York State and the smallest one managed by the National Park Service.

"Since its establishment, the Fire Island Wilderness Area has been managed in essential conformity with the Wilderness Act. The fundamental requirement of that Act is for the managing agency to preserve the "wilderness character" of an area — which includes providing opportunities for solitude and for primitive recreation. The Act also prohibits any structures and installations in a wilderness area, except as may be necessary for its administration.

"Council chapters have expressed their belief that the GMP revision should also include a revision of its Wilderness Management Plan. Substantively, the Council wishes at this time to convey its deep concern for the continued preservation of the FINS Wilderness Area and its character by ensuring that its future stewardship by the National Park Service be in strict conformity with the letter and spirit of the Wilderness Act.

"The surest way for NPS to do so, as reflected in the plan revisions, is to leave the area as it is — adding no new structures or installations of any kind, continuing to remove remains of previous structures incompatible with wilderness, and maintaining current levels of camping and visitation in order to preserve the area's outstanding opportunities for solitude and primitive recreation.

"On behalf of the Council, I invite your close attention to the FINS planning process as it unfolds, and welcome your consideration of our concerns with regard to it."

SSAS Members: You can send comments to Fire Island National Seashore, 120 Laurel St., Patchogue, NY 11772 or fire_island_gmp@nps.gov. Also, you can ask to be put on the GMP e-mail list and/or visit <http://www.nps.gov/fiis/parkmgmt/generalmanagementplan.htm> for info.

wildlife from becoming endangered. These grants support a wide array of projects to restore degraded habitat, reintroduce native wildlife, develop partnerships with private landowners, educate the public, and collect data to find out more about declining species. To ensure that the funds are spent wisely, each state had to develop a Comprehensive Wildlife Conservation Strategy by October 1, 2005, to direct how it will spend these funds. Last year, this category received an appropriation of \$68.5 million.

Status— The President's budget proposal included \$74 million for SWG, the House has proposed funding at \$50 million, and the Senate has proposed funding at \$67.5 million.

Conservation Trust Fund: Land and Water Conservation Fund (Stateside). Created by Congress in 1964, the Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF) provides 50% matching grants to state and local governments to acquire, develop, or improve parkland. This fund helps to provide increased recreational opportunities, and protect and preserve wildlife habitat, drinking water, and historic sites. Last year, Congress appropriated \$29.5 million for State Assistance.

Status— The President's budget proposal included \$0 for State Assistance, the House has proposed \$0, and the Senate has proposed \$30 million. We're working with appropriators to secure the Senate figure and keep this important program alive.

Conservation Trust Fund: Forest Legacy. The federal Forest Legacy program (FL) was created to aid states in protecting environmentally sensitive forest lands by purchasing property or conservation easements. It is a voluntary program that works with private landowners who want to protect their land. Last year, this category received \$56.5 million, with \$1 million for the Tahawus project in the Adirondacks.

Status— The President has proposed \$61.5 million for Forest Legacy, the House has proposed \$12.7 million, and the Senate has proposed \$55 million. We are currently working with the DEC [NYS Department of Environmental Conservation] to identify eligible projects, and working with the New York Congressional delegation to increase appropriations for this program.

Conservation Trust Fund: Neotropical Migratory Bird Conservation Funding. The Neotropical Migratory Bird Conservation Act established a matching grants program to fund projects that promote the conservation of birds in the United States, Latin America, and the Caribbean. The law authorizes \$5 million per year for five years to be spent on bird habitat conservation efforts both here and abroad. At least 75% of these funds must be spent on projects outside the U.S., in areas where neotropical migratory birds spend their winters and gain strength for their flights back to the U.S. Last year, this category was funded at \$3.9 million. The Act is up for reauthorization in 2006.

Status— In May, the House passed its version of the reauthorization of the Neotropical Migratory Bird Conservation Act, which increases the funding authorized from \$5 million to \$6 million, reduces the matching requirement from 3:1 to 1:1 to encourage broader participation in the program, and allows projects in Canada to receive grants. Senate staff report that the bill has been held at the desk and is expected to be passed soon under unanimous consent. The President proposed \$0 funding for this program, and the House and Senate proposals include \$4 million in funding for the program this year.



Highlands Conservation Act. The overall purpose of the Highlands Conservation Act is to foster state and federal partnerships to protect priority conservation lands in the Highlands Region, which encompasses New York, New Jersey, Connecticut, and Pennsylvania. The bill would authorize \$10 million annually over ten years for such land conservation partnership projects, which would cover up to 50% of the cost of purchasing lands or development rights from willing sellers only.

Status— The House and Senate have both proposed \$1 million for this program.

Endangered Species Act. Established in 1973, the Endangered Species Act has been the safety net that has insured the survival of hundreds of species that faced or were threatened with certain extinction. This landmark act is a true conservation success story that has helped to recover many of America's most vulnerable birds and other wildlife, and remains critically important to the protection of others still threatened. In 2005, the House of Representatives passed a proposal that would repeal many of the most important provisions of the act, including eliminating habitat protection for endangered species, bankrupting the Endangered Species Act by requiring virtually unlimited payments to special interests, and limiting protections for threatened species. In 2006, as revisions of this act are debated, we continue to advocate for this act to be protected and enhanced, to keep America's safety net for our most vulnerable birds and wildlife intact.

Status— Bipartisan discussions among Senate Environment and Public Works Committee staff have stalled. Senators James Inhofe (R-OK) and Mike Crapo (R-ID) may still be considering options including attaching anti-ESA language to an appropriations bill as a legislative rider. Congressman Richard Pombo (R-CA), who sponsored the House-passed Threatened and Endangered Species Recovery Act [described above], has recently written to Idaho Gov. Dirk Kempthorne (R) suggesting that the new Interior Secretary nominee [Dirk] explore ways to weaken the act administratively.

Editor's note: On Election Day, Pombo, who chaired the House's Resources Committee, was voted out of office. Info on the status of legislation in Albany will be in the next *Skimmer*, space permitting.