



**BIRD WALKS**

All walks start at 9:30 A.M.; no walk if it rains or snows or temperature is below 25°F. Any questions? Call Steve Schellenger at 987-8103. Directions and summaries may be found at [ssaudubon.org](http://ssaudubon.org).

- Feb. 1 Massapequa Preserve (LIRR N.E. lot)
- Feb. 8 Jones Beach West End #2, N.E. corner
- Feb. 15 Mill Pond Park (Wantagh/Bellmore, north side of Merrick Rd.)
- Feb. 22 Point Lookout Town Park, S.E. corner (Lido Preserve too)
- Mar. 1 Jamaica Bay Wildlife Refuge
- Mar. 8 Hempstead Lake State Park (Southern State Parkway Exit 18 south, Field #3)
- Mar. 15 Jones Beach West End #2, N.E. corner
- Mar. 22 Mill Pond Park
- Mar. 29 Point Lookout Town Park, S.E. corner (and Lido Preserve afterwards)

**STOP INSANITY ISLAND!**

*Jim Brown*

*Editor's note:* The mailing of this *Skimmer* was delayed due to our printer's unexpected vacation; if you're reading this after January 29, please see the last paragraph.

An important public meeting is scheduled for **January 29** in Long Beach regarding the threatened Atlantic Sea Island Group LNG (liquefied natural gas) facility, otherwise known as "Insanity Island," which was first mentioned in the *Skimmer* a year ago. It is important that as many opponents of this misguided project as possible attend the public speaking/meeting session that is scheduled between 6–8 P.M. at the Long Beach Public Library, 111 W. Park Avenue, Long Beach (preceded by an informational open house starting at 4:30); tell your friends. This project will add more greenhouse gases to our atmosphere and will threaten our beaches and marine life. More information appears below, taken from a Clean Ocean Action press release. If you have questions, please contact me (432-8156), call Clean Ocean Action (732-872-0111), or visit [www.cleanoceanaction.org](http://www.cleanoceanaction.org). Like Broadwater in Long Island Sound, this project must be defeated!

The U.S. Coast Guard and U.S. Maritime Administration are hosting two public meetings, one on January 27 in Eatontown, NJ, and a second on January 29 in Long Beach, NY, to begin scoping for an environmental impact statement (EIS) as part of the official review of the proposal.

The proposed man-made island, which is nearly 14 times the size of Giants Stadium [60.5 acres at the surface, 116 to 140 acres at the base, in water 60 to 70 feet deep], is planned for 19 miles off the coast of Sea Bright, New Jersey, and 13 miles off the coast of Long Beach, New York. This same area is home to endangered species, prime fishing grounds, and will destroy underwater habi-

tat, make navigation in the busy port region difficult and more dangerous, and increase safety and security risks.

Nearly 40 New Jersey and New York organizations and six Monmouth County municipalities have signed resolutions opposing LNG projects off the coast. In addition, to date, 5,260 citizens have signed petitions against projects such as "Insanity Island."

Some of the threats groups cited include that the island will require 14 million tons of fill – 10 times the volume of the Empire State Building — and destroy marine habitat and kill marine life. Regarding LNG, groups said the foreign fossil fuel is "un-American" because it is from volatile sources like Russia, the Middle East, and Africa. Further, American sources of natural gas are cheaper and plentiful — enough to meet domestic needs for 120 years. Also, LNG is up to 40% dirtier than American natural gas and will increase carbon dioxide emissions and climate change.

"This company has *no* experience in LNG operations or offshore construction and has been fighting desperately in court to take away New Jersey's right to weigh-in on this insane project," said David Byer, COA Water Policy Attorney.

Written comments can be sent to the two federal agencies for consideration by **February 9**. Visit [www.regulations.gov](http://www.regulations.gov), docket number USCG-2007-28535, for more information.

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## NATURE TALES FROM A WANDERER


### Raptor #3: A Close Encounter

Joe Grupp

Twice last year in this Nature Tales column I wrote of being very close to a raptor as it pursued its prey. One column was about a mature Red-tailed Hawk that missed when attacking some Rock Pigeons feeding under my feeder. The second was about an immature Red-tailed Hawk that was successful in taking a squirrel from a tree only a few yards from where I stood in Bethpage State Park. On New Year's Day 2009, I was surprised by yet another close encounter, which now becomes raptor #3 and the following nature tale.

Sometime around midmorning New Year's Day, I was sitting at my kitchen table enjoying a leisurely cup of coffee and chatting with my wife. Neither of us was paying any attention at all to the activity at our feeder, which we could readily see from where we sat. We were enjoying a simple relaxed holiday moment when out of the corner of my eye, some rapid movement attracted my attention. I quickly turned my head, looked out the window, and simultaneously shouted "Sharpie" as a Sharp-shinned Hawk glided from over our house at great speed towards the feeder.

There were a fair number of birds feeding on the feeder and others, including some pigeons, were feeding on the ground under it. In a split second, I was looking at the back

 of the Sharpie, involuntarily focusing on its tail. The dark and lighter bands were vivid in appearance and offset by a very narrow white band at the end of the tail. A tail that ends straight across or almost straight across if spread out in flight is one of the diagnostic facets of a Sharpie, and this bird's tail ended straight across even as the bird changed the angle of the tail feathers to control flight. It was a field-guide perfect tail!

All of the birds on and around the feeder exploded away from it in flight. The pigeons flew out, up, and away from the approaching hawk. They were high in the air and gone quickly. The others — a mix of sparrows, Dark-eyed Juncos, Northern Cardinals, Blue Jays, etc. — flew away from the feeder and incoming hawk in three straight-line directions. Some flew to the left into a nearby leafless hedge. Others flew straight ahead from the incoming hawk into a leafless weigela bush, and others flew to the right into a more-distant hedge-shaped row of forsythia. All of the birds found perches well into the center area of the shrubs and down from the top. There they were protected by the lattice work of small branches that developed as the result of the shrubs being frequently trimmed. The branches were close enough together to prevent the hawk from getting into the center area of the shrubs, while being far enough apart so that small birds could enter.


The hawk was closing fast on the birds headed for the weigela bush on the back property line, which has a tall

solid fence along it. It was closing fast but not quite fast enough to catch a bird. When it just about reached the shrub and to avoid hitting the fence, it broke its forward motion, swooped almost vertically upward, and perched on the branch of an old apple tree almost entirely hidden from my view by another branch. I could just see the tip of the tail that appeared as straight across as if it were designed and cut by a fine instrument, the hooked beak, and part of the head as the hawk looked down on the small birds below, now protected by the branches of the shrub. In a very few seconds the hawk was off again. It sprang from the perch and with a series of strong wing beats and a glide, it picked up speed and, repeating the series of strong wing beats and a glide, it was gone from the immediate area.

It was an amazing observation that lasted just one or two seconds, or maybe less than that, until the hawk perched. It was even more amazing that I could have instinctively observed so much in so little time. It all happened so fast that the cup of coffee didn't even stand a chance of getting cold.

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*Explore the coast  
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**SOUTH FLORIDA & EVERGLADES** (Feb. 21–28). Visit best wildlife areas of S. Florida, including Flamingo & Shark River (Everglades), Loxahatchee Refuge, Ding Darling Refuge, Big Cypress preserve, Corkscrew Swamp preserve, Wakodahatchee & Green Cay boardwalks, Okeehoelee Nature Center. See over 100 species of birds, including purple gallinule, burrowing owl, barred owl, roseate spoonbill, and reddish egret — plus lots of gators and the endangered American crocodile. Easy hiking and travelling by van. Cost: \$1,795 includes airfare, van rental, gas/tolls, lodging, breakfasts & lunches, guides, park admissions. Good photo opportunities and no birding experience necessary (only two spaces left).

**WINTER WILDLIFE AT JAMAICA BAY** (Sun., Feb. 15). Meet 10 A.M. at refuge center for a two-hour hike around the ponds & upland woods with naturalist Don Riepe to look for winter birds & wildlife. Call (718) 318-9344 to reserve. Free.

**RAPTOR TRUST & GREAT SWAMP REFUGE, NJ** (Sun., April 26). Leave 10 A.M. by bus from Manhattan and return at 6 P.M. Cost: \$65 includes bus and guides.

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For information and free field trip brochure,  
call/write Don Riepe, (718) 318-9344, [driepe@nyc.rr.com](mailto:driepe@nyc.rr.com),  
28 West 9th Road, Broad Channel, NY 11693; [www.alsnyc.org](http://www.alsnyc.org).

## THIS WINTER'S OWLS, INCLUDING SNOWY

Don Riepe

*Editor's note:* The following first appeared on December 22 on the Jamaica Bay e-list, which discusses environmental issues throughout the Jamaica Bay area. I saw two Snowy Owls in the West End of Jones Beach on January 3; SSAS's walk there the next day included one of them.

There have been several Snowy Owls reported so far in the area this winter: Smith's Point, Fire Island; West End 2 dunes, Jones Beach; and 2 were reported killed by aircraft at JFK airport. Unfortunately, one of the best places to find Snowy Owls in winter is at airports along the coast. They like the open, tundra-like habitat, where they hunt rabbits, voles, mice, rats, and probably even muskrats. At JFK there are also black-tailed jackrabbits. Flying low across runways, however, is dangerous for owls (and aircraft). Other owls seen in the area include Saw-whet, Barn, Long-eared (Jones Beach pines), and Screech (five during the Christmas Bird Count on Staten Island). The Great Horned Owl nests in NYC at places like Alley Pond Park, North Brother Island, and I believe in Central Park (North Woods area). A few winters ago, we had our first NYC record for Boreal Owl (Central Park). So, they are all around us. Let's hope that the abundant rats & mice of NYC get them through a tough time of year.



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### MEET YOUR BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Wendy Murbach

South Shore Audubon Society's Board of Directors is full of bright, hard working, caring, environmentally savvy people. All are working very hard in some way to further the mission of our chapter, and to keep South Shore Audubon's bird walks, meetings, and newsletters entertaining and educational.

This month I'd like to introduce Michael "Mike" Sperling, our past president and present *Skimmer* editor. I've asked him some questions, and here are his answers.

1. *How did you get started with South Shore Audubon and when?* I sent a letter to National Audubon Society, asking if there was a local chapter. I joined in 1984 at age 25.

2. *Where did you go to school and what was your major? Degrees?* SUNY Stony Brook; B.S. in Astronomy and Applied Math.

3. *What positions did you hold on SSAS's Board? What position do you hold now?* Newsletter Editor since 1990, VP 1992-1994, Director 2003-2005, President 2005-2008.

4. *What exactly is it you do in your present position on the Board?* Collect and write articles for the *Skimmer*, type and proofread it, lay out the pages, and help prepare mailings.

5. *What else did you do for SSAS?* Member of the Brookside Preserve, Conservation, and Annual Dinner committees; volunteered at birdseed sales and flea markets; served as

Webmaster; attend Long Island and New York State Audubon Council meetings; attended National Audubon Society conventions.

6. *If you are working, what is your job?* Technical Editor for an engineering society.

7. *What is your environmental philosophy?* Not an easy question... I greatly enjoy wildlife and natural scenery, and therefore support numerous environmental organizations in their uphill battle against individuals, companies, and governments that are all too willing to sacrifice the future in favor of short-term gain. I believe in using regulations and government funding to preserve our natural resources.

8. *If you are a birder, how did you get started birding? What is the most interesting birding tale that you were involved with?* As a youngster with binoculars, I was impressed by a mockingbird that used the next-door neighbor's roof antenna as a perch for aerial displays — but I misidentified it as a big junco when my outdated teeny Golden Nature



Guide's maps indicated that mockingbirds (pictured, © Sue deLearie Adair) weren't found this far north!

When I was older, my father started putting birdseed on the ground and attracted a particularly deadly cat; my suggestion that he use feeders was accepted under the condition that I filled them and I've been feeding birds ever since.

The first birding tale that comes to mind took place during an SSAS walk. We encountered an injured herring gull that couldn't fly and there was a rehabilitator on the walk who wanted to bring it to a veterinarian. She asked if anyone had a box for transporting it; as usual, I had empty newsletter cartons in my car's trunk that were awaiting return to our printer, so I volunteered. She carried the gull to the parking lot; all I had to do was hold the box's flaps open. Little did I suspect that as it was being placed in the box, the gull would show its appreciation by biting me on the thumb. Ouch.

9. *What are your other interests?* Rooting for NY sports teams, listening to music (especially old rock & roll), news and weather, traveling, astronomy, reading nonfiction.

10. *What makes South Shore Audubon important in your estimation?* In addition to providing opportunities to meet like-minded people, I think SSAS is important because we help educate people about their natural world and the threats to it, and our reputation and number of members enable us to have a positive effect on what's happening around us.

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### A BELATED THANK YOU

In the last *Skimmer*, we failed to include Charlie Kiefer in our list of people who helped out at our Brookside Preserve cleanup on October 19. Charlie had the distinction of locating the most densely concentrated and varied collection of litter that day, keeping several of us entertained for quite a while. Thanks, Charlie!





**South Shore Audubon Society**  
**P.O. Box 31**  
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*Option 2.* To join NAS and your all-volunteer local chapter, you can help SSAS survive NAS's major dues-share cutbacks by joining Audubon through us for the same price that it costs if you join through NAS (we get \$0 unless you join through us). Mail the form below and your check payable to **National Audubon Society** to SSAS at the address above. The special rate for the first year is \$20 per household; \$15 for students and seniors.

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