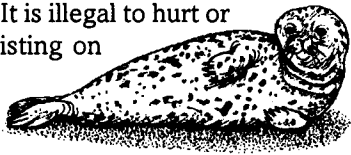


bing up and down. We stared at it, thinking I'm not swimming out to retrieve a football in this icy water, or how did that get there, or more trash in the water, etc. We picked up our binoculars to get a better look. The football had two eyes and whiskers and was looking in toward us. That's how we found our first seal.

The tide was still coming into the inlet, the water on the move, and it turned out that the seals were riding in on the tide. Soon there were more seals to look at, some just floating, others diving. Four seals in all appeared. And so it turned out that the day at West End was wonderful after all.

On Saturday I took another friend to see the seals, and miraculously they appeared right in the boat basin, diving and flipping their back flippers as they parted the water. Sunday's South Shore Audubon bird walk in the fog and rain also saw seals at West End Marina.

The seals we are seeing are Harbor Seals, pinnipeds (meaning that they have flippers), genus *Phoca*, each seal ranging from 150 to 250 pounds in weight. Their population in this area is increasing. It is illegal to hurt or kill them. They are subsisting on fish and shellfish, and generally arrive here in October or November



and stay until spring, when they migrate northward. Keep an eye out for these seals; they will be having pups in February after a nine-month gestation period and maybe we will see baby seals. Sometimes seals haul out of the water on rocks or on sand spits. Please remember that these are wild animals with claws on their flippers and teeth in their mouths, and stay away from them. But gaze at them all you like from a distance. When they are in the water, they may float along on their backs watching you, just as you are watching them.

Go down to West End Coast Guard Station and to Field 10 at Jones Beach to search the water for seals. Bring binoculars or scopes, dress warmly since it is always colder by the water, and enjoy the outdoors this winter. Perhaps you will be very lucky and see those Harlequin Ducks too.



SSAS Mission Statement — The mission of South Shore Audubon Society is to promote environmental education; conduct research pertaining to local bird populations, wildlife, and habitat; and preserve and restore our environment, through responsible activism, for the benefit of both people and wildlife.



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OUR E-LIST http://groups.yahoo.com/group/ssas_list



SPECIAL SSAS SATURDAY FIELD TRIP Morton National Wildlife Refuge

John Gaglione

Established in 1954 through a donation by the Morton family, the 187-acre Elizabeth A. Morton National Wildlife Refuge (according to its website) "boasts exceptionally diverse habitats, including bay beach, a brackish pond, a freshwater pond, kettle holes, tidal flats, salt marsh, freshwater marsh, shrub, grasslands, maritime oak forest, and red cedar."

On **February 19**, you will want to bring along some sunflower seeds when we meet in the parking lot at 11 A.M. Be certain the seeds are unsalted. As you walk along the 1.5-mile nature trail, remember to walk slowly and quietly, and to listen for the Black-capped Chickadees. They will call you, "cheet, twit, cheet, twit" as they implore, "we're hungry." Hold a few sunflower seeds out in your palms and wait for the chickadees (and perhaps other species) to land on your fingers and grab the seeds. You have to remain very still for a while and hold your hands out away from your body.



The trail is easy to follow. Be sure to bring binoculars for observing the wildlife and for the beautiful views that you will see once you hike out onto the beach. The trail visits ponds, a salt-marsh lagoon, and grasslands. Waterfowl use of the refuge peaks during the colder months. Long-tailed Ducks, White-winged Scoter, Common Goldeneye, and American Black Ducks will most likely be spotted.

Much of the refuge is situated on a peninsula surrounded by Noyack and Little Peconic Bays. The north/south orientation of the peninsula makes the refuge important habitat for shorebirds, raptors, and songbirds.

Directions: Sunrise Highway (Route 27) eastbound (from LI Expressway take exit 70, County Road 111 and follow signs to Rt. 27 east; from Southern State Parkway, take exit 44 for Sunrise Highway). Route 27 will change from a highway to a local roadway. A few miles past the Stony Brook Southampton campus (and 17.1 miles from County Road 111), make a left at the County Road 52 intersection (the sign points left for North Sea and Noyack). Proceed 0.9 miles and turn left at a traffic light onto County Road 38 (North Sea Road). Go 1.4 miles and turn right onto Noyack Road. The refuge entrance is on the left in about 5 miles.

The parking fee is \$4 per vehicle, payable by inserting a check or cash in a fee envelope and putting the handwritten receipt on your dashboard. Any questions? Call me at 731-5012 or the Long Island NWR Complex at 631-286-0485.



VOLUNTEERS FOR WILDLIFE (631) 423-0982



AUDUBON MEMBERSHIP STATUS (800) 274-4201



NATURE TALES FROM A WANDERER Northern Harrier – Predator

Joe Grupp

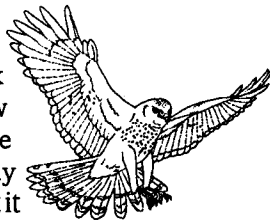
It was strictly by chance that we visited the Edwin B. Forsythe National Wildlife Refuge, also known as Brigantine [the better-known of two refuges that were combined as Forsythe in 1984], in southern New Jersey late in November. We happened to have earned a free night stay at a hotel chain we frequently use and we would have lost it if not used by the end of the month. An overnight stay near the refuge and visiting it the next day was simply a good way to use the free night.

While the refuge was not overly active, it was not long before we realized that we were having a good day. A fairly close observation of an American Golden Plover and another of a Stilt Sandpiper were reward enough for our trip. Both were spotted along the first part of the 8-mile loop of Wildlife Drive, which borders water impoundments, marshes, etc. By the time we were about three-quarters of the way around the loop, the Northern Pintails and Green-winged Teals, which were most numerous and spread across the refuge, and the many other species associated with a water-marsh habitat that we observed were getting repetitive and as a result somewhat boring. Of course, that did not stop us from stopping again and again to observe them. Boring almost became impending drudgery as I started to think of the long drive home.

Those thoughts disappeared quickly when a Northern Harrier came up from behind us and, flying over the water's edge, flushed a large number of ducks, etc., that were sheltering among the grasses there. There was a continuous scattering of ducks, etc., just ahead of the Harrier, changing a peaceful scene into mayhem. A short period of time after the Harrier passed, many of the ducks, etc., returned.

Just as they settled back in and all seemed peaceful again, the process repeated itself with the Harrier coming from in front of us. The ducks, etc., scattered as before until the Harrier was just before us, when it swooped down, talons extended, and struck what I first thought was an American Coot but later realized was a duck of some type.

A struggle ensued and there was the flailing of wings and the wild splashing of water. It was obvious that the Harrier did not initially have complete control of the situation, as it was flopping around and flapping its wings as much as the duck was. Slowly, however, the Harrier began to gain control and was doing so by shifting its weight in a manner that forced the duck under the surface of the shallow water, apparently pinning it to the bottom. Grasses, etc., partially obstructed our view at times, but it soon became evident that the Harrier was trying to drown the duck. As the Harrier began to gain control, it lifted its



wings high towards the sky so that they made a "V" shape, its body being the base of the "V." Altering the shape of the "V," the Harrier gained more and more control until the entire duck was held under the water.

All then became calm as the Harrier, with its wings still extended and in the water up to the point where they joined its body, maneuvered them ever so slightly to maintain control. Time passed and I began to wonder how long this would go on, when surprisingly there was some more splashing and the duck's head appeared out of the water for a brief moment. The Harrier once again controlled the situation, never dropping its wings, but moving them in a manner that forced the duck's head back under the water.

We waited and watched for a long period of time and I once again began to wonder how long this would go on. Finally, the Harrier, with strong rapid wing beats, lifted into the air with the limp body of the duck in its talons. It rose about ten feet into the air, when it became evident that the duck was too heavy to lift and it dropped it back into the water. It tried a second time to lift the duck, this time getting it over the grasses at the water's edge before dropping it again. Then it dropped down on the duck, covered it with its wings and body as raptors are often inclined to do, and remained there. I expected to see a few small feathers float away on the wind as it began to feast on its prey, but nothing happened. The Harrier just remained motionless there.

All of a sudden, a second Harrier swooped in on the first, chasing it off its prey. It too tried to lift the duck and fly away but could not. It rose a few feet with the duck in its talons and then dropped it, dropped down, and hunkered over it just as the first one had. The first bird made no effort to chase the second off. It just flew away. A period of time again passed and then the second Harrier simply flew away, leaving the prey behind. We waited a while longer and neither Harrier returned.

Then a gentleman who had parked behind us and observed most of what we had, pulled up next to our car. He rolled down his window, gave us a thumbs up sign while saying words to the effect that our mutual observation was amazing, and then he drove off. Amazing it was! Needless to say, I was no longer bored even as I faced a long drive home.

Enid R. Klein

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14TH ANNUAL GBBC

The 14th annual **Great Backyard Bird Count** is coming up **February 18–21**. The four-day holiday-weekend event is free, and is open to bird-watchers of all ages and skill levels. Participants watch birds for any length of time on one or more days of the count and enter their tallies at www.birdcount.org. The results provide a snapshot of the whereabouts of more than 600 bird species. The GBBC is a joint project of the National Audubon Society and the Cornell Lab of Ornithology with Canadian partner Bird Studies Canada.

The 2010 GBBC was another record breaker with more than 97,300 bird checklists submitted by an estimated 63,000 volunteers from across the United States and Canada.

You may find it helpful to print a regional tally sheet so you have a list of birds you're likely to see in our area in February; you can get one at <http://gbbc.birdsource.org/gbbcApps/checklist>.

Count birds at any location for at least 15 minutes. Later you'll be asked to record the amount of time you spent watching. Write down only the highest number of each species you see together at any one time, to avoid counting the same birds more than once. You'll submit your data on a new checklist for each day you participate in the count. You can submit more than one checklist on a given day if you count at more than one site.

On the website, participants can explore real-time maps and charts that show what others are reporting during the count. The site has tips to help identify birds and special materials for educators. Data from all previous years' counts are at the website, including by state and by town.

NY's ten most frequently reported species in the 2010 GBBC were: #1 Black-capped Chickadee (4,210 checklists), #2 Northern Cardinal, #3 Downy Woodpecker, #4 Dark-eyed Junco, #5 Blue Jay, #6 Mourning Dove, #7 Tufted Titmouse, #8 White-breasted Nuthatch, #9 American Crow, #10 American Goldfinch (2,344 checklists).

NY's ten most numerous species in the 2010 GBBC were: #1 Canada Goose (72,537 individuals), #2 American Crow, #3 Ring-billed Gull, #4 Mallard, #5 European Starling, #6 Herring Gull, #7 Mourning Dove, #8 Dark-eyed Junco, #9 American Goldfinch, #10 Black-capped Chickadee (20,459 individuals).

Submit Your GBBC Lists to Joe, Too! See page 7.

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"DUCKIES" SET FOR CHAMPIONSHIP RUN

Michael Givant

Editor's note: The following article originally appeared on September 11, 2009 in Anton Community Newspapers and is reprinted with permission from the author, an SSAS member, whose monthly "A Bird's Eye View" articles appear in Anton's newspapers and website.

Nassau County's entry in the All-Avian Football League (the AAFL), the Not So Mighty Ducks, affectionately known as the "Duckies," is set for a run at the league's championship this season. While high-flying offenses put fans in the stands, rock-ribbed defenses win titles. The Ducks have spent the off-season revamping their defense, whose first priority is to stop the run. The passing game, while always dangerous, is secondary because in northeastern winter's cold, balls are sometimes dropped by frozen feathered "fingers." Here, position by position, is the unit that hopes to compete in the league's championship game, the Feather Bowl, to be played this year at Stillwell Woods in Syosset.

Left End — Stopping the run starts with the Mute Swan, who may not say much but is 60 inches in length with a hose-like neck. The bird at this position has to get past an offensive lineman and hit the runner in the backfield. He'll cause havoc and fumbles just by stretching out that neck.

Left Tackle — The Great Horned Owl has tufted ears, a saucer-like depression that houses its unwavering yellow eyes that slowly open and close, and an eerie "hooting" call. Eye to eye with this guy, offensive linemen occasionally become unnerved and forget the snap count.

Right Tackle — This position requires size and strength to stop the run, as well as a wingspan to deflect passes. The Great Black-backed Gull has the bulk and strength to stop the inside running game. Passing over its 65-inch wingspan is a quarterback's nightmare.

Right End — Speed is needed to get to the quarterback and there is no faster bird than the Peregrine Falcon. The lineman at this position rushes the quarterback from his "blind side." This bird routinely dives at 200 mph and can be in an opponent's backfield before the quarterback takes the snap.

Left Linebacker — Every defense needs a bird that stands nearly 4 feet in length, with a javelin-like bill that **can spear a runner in a millisecond. No bird has more guts than the Great Blue Heron, who routinely swallows fishermen's throwaways covered in sand. He's an every-down player and an All-Avian pick.**

Middle Linebacker — This position requires the strength to take on pulling guards and "pancake" inside runners. With its knobby, bald, red head, and large, black body, the oddly fearsome, yet homely looking, Turkey Vulture is an avian "Dracula in shoulder pads." Its large nostrils help this buzzard to smell the run.

Right Linebacker — The Northern Harrier has the speed and agility to rush the passer, as well as the ability

to drop back in pass coverage. He'll chase down any outside runner before he can turn the corner. It's no accident several countries, including the U.S. and Great Britain, have fighter aircraft named after this slim hawk.

Left Cornerback — With 28-mph speed, the Sharpshinned Hawk is a "shut down" corner. Nicknamed the "bullet hawk" or "pigeon hawk," it feasts on wide receivers. The "Sharpie" can also help on running plays. Running backs feel it when this guy sticks it to them.

Right Cornerback — The bird at this position covers the offense's best receiver. The Merlin has the speed and agility to cover the best pass catcher and a "magical" ability to intercept throws occasionally held up by a stiff nor'easter. This falcon is a fan favorite at tailgate parties.

Strong Safety — The Red-breasted Merganser, a diving duck, is big and strong enough to cover tight ends downfield. With a conspicuous rusty breast and stylish crest, his photo is on the cover of the team's program, available at every home game.



Free Safety — The multicolored Kestrel can hover above the ground, which is crucial to his role as the defense's "center fielder." From there he can see the whole field, cover deep pass plays, help with the run, or blitz the quarterback. The U.S. Marine Corps is developing a helicopter that bears his name. Need we say more?

Every team needs a goal-line defense when the other team is close to its end zone and wants to run the ball for a game winning TD. That's when most of the defensive backs come out and the big boys, the Herring Gull, the Canada Goose, and the Red-tailed Hawk come in. This jumbo package is designed to stop the short-yardage running game.

Here's the scenario. With less than a minute left in the Feather Bowl Championship game, the Duckies hold a tenuous 14-10 lead. Their opponent, the Suffolk Bay Gulls, have the ball, goal to go, at the Ducks 2-yard line. They run three plays with no gain. On fourth down, the Gulls break the huddle and walk to the line of scrimmage, steam coming from their breath. The clock is ticking. The Audubon Trophy is on the line. Duckies fans are on their feet, shaking white picket D-fences and screaming for their guys to hold one last time.

The Gulls' tailback takes the hand off and starts to launch himself up and over the mass of feathers and beaks. The ball, held outstretched in his wings, needs only to break the plane of the goal line. Simultaneously, a wall of muddy, grass-stained Ducks rises up and smothers the runner for a loss! The Duckies take over on downs, take a knee, and are Feather Bowl champions! Quacking joyously, they douse their coach, a Mallard, with the traditional Gatorade birdbath. Ecstatic fans, some with tears streaming down their cheeks, hug each other, while others Twitter friends.

The next day, Jericho Turnpike is closed from Route 135 to Routes 106 and 107 for Nassau's answer to New

York's Canyon of Heroes Parade, the Strip Mall Parade. Each Duckie rides atop a solar-powered golf cart while their ecstatic fans throw organic birdseed. After this, it's off to the White House for a photo op with the president, and they won't need e-tickets to get there.

DRAFT NASSAU COUNTY MASTER PLAN

Editor's note: Yes, this was in the last *Skimmer* too, but the deadline has been extended twice since then and a second hearing has been scheduled — and rescheduled.

The Nassau County Planning Commission will be hosting a public hearing on the draft plan on February 3, beginning at 10 A.M. It will take place at the Theodore Roosevelt Executive & Legislative Building, 1550 Franklin Avenue, Mineola. The draft and/or comments received from some agencies and organizations can be downloaded from www.nassaucountyny.gov/agencies/planning/MasterPlan.html. Comments are due the same day and should be sent to:

Attn: Master Plan Comments
Nassau County Planning Department
100 County Seat Drive; Mineola, NY 11501

You can contact Satish Sood, Deputy Commissioner, at 571-5924, or Sean Sallie, AICP, Planner, at 571-5803 with any questions or concerns.

RARE BIRD ALERT (212) 979-3070



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NYC AUDUBON WINTER BIRD WALK (Sat., Feb. 12). Meet 10 A.M. at the Jamaica Bay Refuge visitor center for 3-hour hike around the ponds and gardens to look for hawks, owls, winter finches, and resident songbirds. Leader: Don Riepe. Call refuge to register, (718) 318-4340.

NYC AUDUBON EARLY SPRING MIGRANTS (Sat., March 26). Meet 10 A.M. at the Jamaica Bay Refuge for 3-hour hike around the ponds and gardens to look for the first returning birds of spring. We should see egrets, oystercatchers, ibis, phoebes, osprey, and many other species. Call refuge to reserve, (718) 318-4340; e-mail donriep@gmail.com.

CUMBERLAND ISLAND NATIONAL SEASHORE / OKEFENOKEE SWAMP (Apr. 9-17). Cost: \$1,995 incl. RT airfare to Jacksonville, 8 nights lodging (double occ.), van, ferry, canoe, breakfasts & lunches, park fees, guides. Visit best birding and wildlife areas of South Georgia Coast & Northern Florida. See gators, wood storks, bald eagles, barred owls, sandhill cranes, anhingas, painted buntings, endangered red-cockaded woodpecker, many more species.

ASSATEAGUE NATIONAL SEASHORE / CHINCOTEAGUE WILDLIFE REFUGE (May 12-15). Cost: \$375/person.

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

