

BIRD WALKS
Steve Schellenger

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 at 987-8103. Directions and summaries may be found at ssaadubon.org.

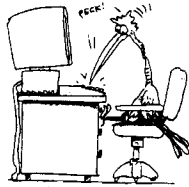
- Jan. 29 Pelham Bay Park*
- Feb. 5 Jones Beach West End #2, N.E. corner
- Feb. 12 Mill Pond Park (Wantagh/Bellmore, north side of Merrick Rd.)
- Feb. 19 Point Lookout Town Park, S.E. corner (and Lido Preserve afterwards)
- Feb. 26 Massapequa Lake**
- Mar. 4 Jamaica Bay Wildlife Refuge

*For Pelham Bay Park (where we hope to see owls): Wear hiking shoes—it's a hilly forest walk to the bay. Take Throgs Neck Bridge to I-695 north to I-95 north. Take I-95 to exit #9, Hutchinson River Parkway north. Take first exit #5, Orchard Beach Rd., go past traffic circle, and continue on Orchard Beach Rd. to end. Turn left on Park Dr. to enter park. Go past another traffic circle and enter parking lot thru toll gates (free); meet at far left corner of parking lot (northeast corner). See <http://mappery.com/map-of/Pelham-Bay-Park-NYC-Map> for reference.

**For Massapequa Lake (the southern end of Massapequa Preserve), use street parking on westbound side of Merrick Road, west of Lake Shore Blvd.

**GREAT BACKYARD BIRD COUNT,
FEBRUARY 17-20**

The 15th annual Great Backyard Bird Count will be led by the Cornell Lab of Ornithology and National Audubon Society, with partner Bird Studies Canada. Everything you need to know to participate is at www.birdcount.org, including downloadable instructions, FAQs, a how-to video, a regional list of the birds you might see in our area in February, and results from previous years.



As you gear up for this year's GBBC, preliminary data coming from Audubon's Christmas Bird Count suggest some shifts in where birds are spending their time, perhaps due to the season's relatively mild temperatures. Data suggest that bird species we tend to see in concentrated areas during colder temperatures are now dispersed throughout the landscape, taking advantage of the open marshes and ponds. Consider New York's Central Park, where warm temperatures may have played a role in a low bird count this holiday season. Participants tallied 3,286 birds – 3,000 fewer than last year.

The Great Backyard Bird Count is an annual four-day event (Presidents' Day weekend) that engages bird-watchers of all ages in counting birds to create a real-time snapshot of where the birds are across the continent.

Anyone can participate, from beginning bird-watchers to experts. It takes as little as 15 minutes on one day, or you can count for as long as you like each day of the event. It's free, fun, and easy—and it helps the birds. Participants tally the highest number of birds of each species seen together at any one time. To report your counts, fill out an online checklist at the Great Backyard Bird Count website—and share them with Joe Grupp!

BOOKS FOR BIRDERS

R. U. Abyrdar II

Our latest book is another wonderful read—*Central Park in the Dark* by Marie Winn (author of *Red-Tails in Love*). How many of us have ever birded Central Park? I see lots of hands. But, at night? Not really? Then read this book. The author dares us to venture into this 850-acre park at NIGHT. And she does and lives to write a book about her many adventures, at NIGHT! She explores this vast natural world in the midst of one of the largest cities in the world. And what wonderful experiences she has. Her



chapters on owls are just marvelous, as well as the chapters on bird roost trees. Who would have known? As you read this book, remember Bergdorf Goodman; you'll see why. The roughhousing and jockeying for position in the tree before the birds go to sleep is marvelous observation.

I'd follow Ms. Winn into the park at night any time! She is a very engaging writer. From Screech Owl rescues to slug sex, she pulls us into this nocturnal world. Could this be happening in the midst of the hustle and bustle of this busy city? Some of us may wonder why most of the birders in this book seem both nutty and obsessive; are we? Just a little? Some of us might take issue with the way she seems to be guilty of anthropomorphizing these nonhuman subjects she so profoundly cares about and writes about. This book also showcases the tiny band of wildlife stalkers that follow her into these nighttime adventures. Some of us may know people like that. The entire book was a *fun* read! Really eye-opening! A very engaging and charming book. READ it!!

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.*

SSAS Post Office Statement — *South Shore Skimmer is published monthly from September through December and February through May by South Shore Audubon Society, P.O. Box 31, Freeport, NY 11520-0031.*

HELP RESTORE THE ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION FUND

Editor's first note: Back in November, SSAS signed onto a letter to Governor Cuomo regarding the 2012-13 budget for the EPF. That letter and much more information is posted at We Love New York (<http://keepprotectingny.com>), which is sponsored by 13 environmental organizations including Audubon NY. It "is a collaborative effort on the part of dozens of organizations and thousands of citizens across New York committed to advocating for much-needed resources to the state's environmental agencies, including the Department of Environmental Conservation and the Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation, and a strong and vital Environmental Protection Fund to preserve our natural and historic heritage." Information about the campaign is available via 800-SAVE-NYS and EPF@keepprotectingny.org. Their website includes a file with a list of Nassau County EPF projects, preceded by the following:

The Environmental Protection Fund has provided more than \$1 billion since 1993 to support critical programs that protect our clean water, public health, and industries including agriculture and tourism. Our local economy and good quality jobs have been enhanced and supported thanks to the EPF, which has pumped more than \$87 million into our local economy. Below are a few examples of how the EPF has paid off for Nassau County:

- ⌘ More than \$15 million from the EPF has been invested in protecting Nassau County's open spaces, parks, and farms. This funding has helped to preserve Long Island's beaches, farms, vineyards, and parklands, which generate \$2.74 billion in economic benefits annually. These programs also help sustain the thriving Long Island tourism industry with annual revenues of \$4.7 billion.

- ⌘ Over \$7 million has been contributed toward municipal recycling and household hazardous waste disposal programs.

- ⌘ More than \$22 million has been provided for waterfront revitalization and water quality projects.

- ⌘ Over \$5 million dollars has been dedicated to landfill closure.

- ⌘ \$3 million has protected our museums, memorials, and historic houses that draw tourists and represent our cultural history, including Westbury Gardens, Nassau County Museum of Art, and Theodore Roosevelt Sanctuary.

- ⌘ Almost \$5 million has been deployed in Nassau and Suffolk Counties to protect the South Shore Estuary Reserve and improve public access to our bays and beaches.

- ⌘ Over \$4 million has been distributed for farmers and municipalities to contain polluted runoff and comply with state and federal water quality mandates.

By supporting the EPF you can help ensure continued funding for these important programs in your district, and protect what we love most about Nassau County.

Editor's second note: Information about the upcoming lobby day on behalf of the EPF follows and was sent to us by Audubon New York's Director of Government Relations and Communications, Sean Mahar, whose spouse is the event's coordinator.



In New York, money doesn't grow on trees, but some jobs do. The Environmental Protection Fund works!

We need your help to protect New York's healthy air and water, clean beaches, bays and rivers, working farms and forests, acces-

sible parks and historic sites, community recycling programs, zoos, and botanical gardens! Join with us as we meet with state legislators to advocate in support of these programs as part of New York's economic recovery!

Join us in Albany on **Monday, February 13** as we rally in support of New York's Environmental Protection Fund. To register for the day, please send an e-mail including your name, organization, mailing address, phone number, and e-mail address.

The event will run from 9:30 A.M. until 4 P.M. A light continental breakfast will be served. More information, including directions to the Capitol, hotel information, lobbying tips, fact sheets, and a schedule will be provided to participants prior to the day. No lobbying experience is necessary.

For more information, please contact Jessica Ottney Mahar, The Nature Conservancy in New York, at 518-690-7873 or jottney@tnc.org.

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24TH ANNUAL WATERFOWL SURVEY DATES

The remaining dates for the 2011-2012 Waterfowl Survey are as follows, rain or shine: **Saturdays, February 4 and 25, and March 24.**

Volunteers are welcome to participate in the surveys. If you are interested in spending a full or half day visiting up to 28 locations from Valley Stream to Massapequa Park, call Joe Grupp, SSAS's Research Chairperson, at 481-4208. A second team, led by Paul Butkereiit, surveys the freshwater ponds in the Five Towns area. The Ruddy Duck, a local species, is shown above.



GRACE'S WARBLER AT POINT LOOKOUT

Doug Gochfeld

Editor's note: I thank John Gaglione for forwarding this article to me, about the first Grace's Warbler ever recorded on the east coast. I've shortened it a bit; the full version plus photos can be found by searching the Web.

On January 1, 2012, I participated in the Point Lookout section of the Southern Nassau Christmas Bird Count. My party consisted of Seth Ausubel, Andrew Baksh, and, for a brief time, Pat Aitken. At about 10 A.M. we pulled into the Town of Hempstead's Point Lookout Town Park parking lot to bird the edges of the lot, and the pines and rock pile to the north of the lot.

After a brief discussion on a division of labor, Seth and Pat went down to work the south edges of the lot and the dunes there, and Andrew and I would work the pines and rock pile heading west. Andrew and I walked up to the pines next to where the big "Exit" sign is along the entrance/exit road on the north side of the parking lot. It had been a very slow morning for passerines (and most birds in general) so far. After pishing for a minute or two at the edge of the pines, we stopped pishing and were about to go try and see if we could penetrate the pine stand



to look for owls. Andrew was already moving towards the pines, looking for a way in, when I saw a small (smaller than a parrot) passerine in the pines, which I summed would be a warbler. I told Andrew to "Stop," although he apparently didn't need telling, since he got on the bird almost immediately as well. The bird, of course, was doing a reasonably good job of hiding in the shade of pine needle clusters.

My first view of it through binoculars was of a warbler in the shade, showing bold white wing-bars (covert tips). For the first second or so, I could see no color, it was facing away, and the head was obscured by a branch. The first thought was that it was likely one of the more-expected winter warblers to be found in a pine grove, a Pine Warbler, but it immediately moved into the sun a little and I was able to see the GRAY base color of the back and wings, and I very briefly considered Yellow-throated Warbler until it turned slightly and showed restricted yellow on the throat and the thick yellow supraloral area. I then said something along the lines of "Uuuuuhhhh, is this a Graace's Warbler...?" Andrew, being rightly skeptical and not having much (if any? not sure) experience with this species, asked "why isn't it a Pine Warbler?" I mentioned the gray back, lack of spectacles with the large amount of yellow above the eye, and the small bill, and that it looked like it was a Grace's Warbler. I started pishing some more and it seemed to respond, as it came closer and popped up into the sun for brief periods. This whole time, I was taking lots of photos of the bird. It then disappeared into the impenetrable pine fortress. Andrew still thought it was probably a Pine Warbler, and I was still in disbelief

that a Grace's Warbler could be here, and I mentioned that maybe there was some range of variation of some Pine Warbler plumage that I'd never seen that had a grayish back and washed out/not noticeable spectacles. The bill size and thinness were also bothersome, because these would rule out both Pine and Yellow-throated. I had had extensive experience with Grace's Warblers in the mountains of southeast Arizona in April and May, and a small bill was certainly a characteristic of that species. Hmmmm.

I radioed Seth that we had a "Possible Pine Warbler, unless it was a Grace's Warbler." He responded back "Possible Pine Warbler, what is that — a new subspecies?" I told him I would let him know of any further developments.

Andrew and I, after briefly hemming and hawing over going back to the car to double-check Pine Warbler variation in a field guide, decided that we would keep birding since there was clearly some activity, and that this bird obviously wasn't going anywhere and would be there when we came back. As we worked a little to the east in what was quickly becoming clear was an area essentially devoid of birds, I mulled the idea of a Grace's Warbler over in my mind, and I became a little more comfortable with that initially unexpected possibility. It had certainly NOT previously been on my radar, and I couldn't remember any specific records on the east coast, and I couldn't remember considering it for my list of the "Next 10 species to show up in NYS." As Andrew began walking into the pines elsewhere to try and find owls or something, I stopped and looked back at the last photos I had taken, after having let my objectivity come back. As soon as the first photo popped onto the screen, just one single thought popped into my mind: "That's a Grace's Warbler."

I told Andrew we needed to go back to the car (about 100 yards away) NOW to double-check Pine Warbler variation in the Sibley. Mine was locked in Seth's car, so when we got to the car, Andrew gave me his eastern Sibley guide. I immediately ruled out the possibility of the bird being a Pine Warbler, and I wanted to show Andrew a picture of a Grace's to convince him and just triple-check to make sure that I wasn't crazy. Of course it wasn't in that field guide, so we had to look at his National Geographic guide. While we got to that page, I giddily said something like: "Dude, it's a Grace's Warbler." We still needed to make sure I wasn't completely crazy and/or missing something, so we needed to get Seth over there. I radioed Seth and the conversation went like this:

Doug: "Seth, do you copy? It's a Grace's Warbler, not a Pine."

Seth: "What?"...long pause "Wait, you were serious about Grace's?!?!?"

Doug: "Yes, definitely. You gonna head over here?"

Seth (in classic sarcastic New Yorker fashion, and probably my favorite line of the day): "Oh I dunno, lemme THINK about it."... "Yeah, I'll be right over."


We went back to the pine grove and Seth appeared shortly thereafter, rushing over with Pat. Andrew showed Seth a photo of it as Seth got to us, and the words that came out of Seth's mouth were something like "Holy Mother of God," or "Holy __," or something along those lines. While continuing to get the word out to others (we had at that point only informed Shai Mitra, nearby in the Baldwin territory of the CBC, who was on standby waiting for a sent photo), we pished for a bit and nothing happened.

We played the Grace's Warbler's song and the bird came right out to the outside of the pine grove. We were then able to track it as it foraged partially in the open for a few minutes, and we posted the news online and contacted everyone we could think of.

Soon after, cars began to pour in, carrying birders from all over the count circle, as the Southern Nassau CBC completely disintegrated, or rather was condensed down to just the parking lot. We were planning on using tape once the entire wave of first responders arrived, but luckily the bird was soon re-found without tape and began being mostly cooperative, although it wasn't coming in as close as earlier. Eventually everybody who arrived within the first couple of hours after it was found saw it well. The south(ish) wind picked up rapidly through the day, and those that arrived after 2 P.M. did not get to see the bird that afternoon.



OUR WEB SITE (incl. online store) www.ssaudubon.org



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THE WINTER WOODS IN THE NORTH FORTY NATURAL AREA, FLOYD BENNETT FIELD (Sat., Feb. 25). Meet at the main entrance Ranger Station at 9 A.M. The North Forty Natural Area, one of New York's best kept secrets, can become a Winter Wonderland. Search for wintering birds on the freshwater pond and along the shore of Mill Basin. Meet naturalist Mickey Maxwell Cohen and carpool to the site. Call 718-471-2166 for info and reservation. Free two-hour walk.

LATE WINTER WILDLIFE WALK AT JAMAICA BAY REFUGE (Sun., Feb. 26). From 10 A.M. – 1 P.M., hike around the pond and wooded areas to look for winter birds and very early signs of spring. Leader: Don Riepe. To reserve, contact Don. Free (with NYC Audubon).

EARLY SPRING BIRD MIGRATION HIKE AT JAMAICA BAY REFUGE (Sat., Mar. 31). Many birds return to the refuge early. From 10 A.M. – 1 P.M., we'll look for great egret, laughing gull, American oystercatcher, phoebe, osprey, and more. Leader: Don Riepe. Free (with NYC Audubon).

SPRING MIGRATION BIRD WALK AT JAMAICA BAY REFUGE (Sat., Apr. 28). From 10 A.M. – 1 P.M., hike around refuge trails to look for migrating warblers, orioles, tanagers, and many other species. Leader: Don Riepe. Free (with NYC Audubon).

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

AN EVEN GREENER FARMINGDALE STATE COLLEGE

Therese Lucas

It is an exhilarating experience for us when a Greening of Long Island donation is arranged. It is further enhanced when we receive letters of appreciation with details regarding the plantings, as we did in November from Michael Veracka, Chair, Ornamental Horticulture, at Farmingdale State College.

On April 9, 2011, their half-acre Sustainable Garden was opened; it is the newest component of their Teaching Gardens. The garden's major components will demonstrate sustainable landscape design and horticultural principles, promoting environmental stewardship through the development of a landscape that demonstrates:

Resource conservation – minimal outside inputs of water, topsoil, fertilizers, and toxic pest control methods. The materials selected for use in the garden will be obtained within 350 miles of Farmingdale.

Recycling principles – water retention techniques utilizing the collection and dispersal of rainwater; soil building techniques utilizing compost and compost tea, living mulches/cover crops.

Plant selection – plant selections that demonstrate the "right plant for the right place," matching plants suitable to the specific habitat rather than modifying a site for the plants.

Among the donated plantings were red maple, sugar maple, persimmon, black tupelo, American hophornbeam, white oak, bur oak, black oak, red oak, shining sumac, American elderberry, sassafras, lowbush blueberry, dwarf witchalder, witch hazel, northern spice-bush, and sweetgum.



Not only is it fulfilling to think about how the plantings will grow, but how the students will grow even more.

The college's gardens are open to the public; check first for dates and times of availability. See www.farmingdale.edu/campuspages.business.horticulture/ for information.



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