







# NATURE TALES FROM A WANDERER

## Black Turnstones Plow Ahead

*Joe Grupp*

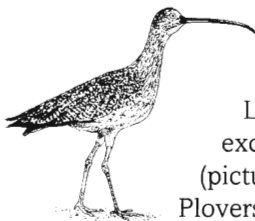
We were up early and on a San Diego, California beach at sunrise, binoculars in hand, to see what we could find. The Pacific Ocean spread out before us, its waters broken by a steep-sided island a fair distance away. We walked first toward Point Loma, a tall headland, its steep cliffs defining it, lying across the entrance to San Diego Bay; then, turning around, walked toward the tall buildings of the city of San Diego. The scenery was as picturesque as it gets and more so, as the early sun's rays penetrated a sea mist.

The sands of the beach are similar to but not exactly the same as that of Jones Beach. They are firmer and not quite as white. Near the shoreline were what looked at first to be small mounds of sand, but were really small mounds of seaweed left by the last high tide and covered with wind-blown sand. We had little interest in them until a small sandpiper-type bird flew in, landed close to one, scampered over to it, and tore the mound apart, feeding on whatever it found there. Getting our glasses on the bird, we found it to be a Black Turnstone, a relative of the Ruddy Turnstone that we frequently see at home during migration.

The Black Turnstone is a west coast bird that is fairly easy to identify with its dark brown/dull black overall plumage and its white belly in winter. It breeds in a concentrated area near the northwestern Alaskan coast. Having an estimated population of 95,000 birds and a concentrated breeding area, it is listed on the U.S. WatchList of Birds of Conservation Concern.

As we walked, we saw a second bird run toward and attack another pile of sand-covered seaweed. Then, scanning the near beach looking for more, we found a total of six individual birds all exhibiting the same behavior. Before long, the behavior itself became the concentration of our observations.

Each time a bird ran to a mound, it would use its beak to flip some of the sand and seaweed aside, digging deeper and deeper into the pile as it did so. Then we were amazed as we watched the bird bow its head into the loosened portion of the pile and energetically push into the pile, literally plowing it open with its head, much as a farmer plows open a field. Once the seaweed was exposed, the bird picked among it with its bill, apparently finding small bits of food. At first I thought the plowing to be an isolated incident, but we observed it over and over again until we were no longer fascinated by it.



We saw a few other species that morning: Marbled Godwits with their long slightly upturned bills; a Long-billed Curlew or two with their exceptionally long downcurved bills (pictured); a flock of Black-bellied Plovers resting, some on one leg, unless

we got too close to them, which we tried to avoid. A few Sanderlings were chasing the waves, just as they do here at home. A number of Western Gulls, black wings and back contrasting with their white head and underparts, flew over us, going out over the sea or coming in from it while one or two Ring-billed Gulls were doing the same. The sea itself offered up a California Brown Pelican or two and a line of cormorants, whose species I could not determine, flying just above the water.

Our walk lasted about an hour and was more than satisfying. The beach was nice, the scenery exceptional, and the birds, while not entirely new to us, were in different settings, groupings, and numbers. Most of all I will remember it for a long time because of the action of the Black Turnstones as they used their heads to plow through the sand-covered seaweed piles looking for breakfast, which was a first observation for me, even if it is a normal part of their behavior as I suspect it is.



## PLUM ISLAND UPDATE

*Editor's note:* SSAS joined the Preserve Plum Island Coalition ([www.preserveplumisland.org](http://www.preserveplumisland.org)) when it was formed five years ago. Located less than a mile from the tip of Long Island's North Fork, the 843-acre Plum Island includes the well-known Animal Disease Center but is approximately 90% undeveloped. Its wildlife habitat, which the Coalition wants to see preserved by the federal government (e.g., as a National Wildlife Refuge), has been in danger of being sold to developers since 2008, when Congress approved plans to build a \$1 billion National Bio and Agro-Defense Facility in Kansas, with a tiny fraction of the cost required to come from selling Plum Island to the highest bidder.

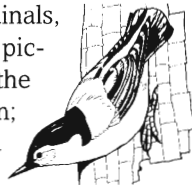
Last July, Democratic and Republican members of the Congressional delegations from Connecticut and Long Island held a press conference calling for the repeal of the requirement that Plum Island be sold. Six months later, the Preserve Plum Island Coalition issued the following statement which didn't fit in last month's *Skimmer*: "Save the Sound, one of our coalition members, and Soundkeeper Inc. will be submitting a 60-day notice letter to the General Services Administration [GSA] and Department of Homeland Security [DHS] under the Endangered Species Act today [January 5]. The letter outlines that GSA/DHS failure to properly consult with USFWS [U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service] and NMFS [National Marine Fisheries Service] led to a faulty EIS [Environmental Impact Statement] that did not consider options that would conserve land to ensure protection of wildlife and habitat. The goal of this letter is threefold: 1) to get GSA/DHS to seriously consider conservation sale options before it is too late; 2) to ensure the EIS will be modified to reflect these conservation options; and 3) to give our Congressionals a stick to call for a change in the original authorizing sale language."

**MORTON NWR VISIT**



On **Saturday, March 14**, SSAS's Joanne Del Prete will provide unsalted sunflower seeds (for those who don't have their own supply for backyard bird feeding) and lead us at 10:30 A.M. from the parking lot of the Elizabeth A. Morton National Wildlife Refuge.

As we walk slowly along the 1.2-mile nature trail, we will hold a few sunflower seeds out in our palms and pause for Black-capped Chickadees and other species to land on our fingers and grab the seeds, as they've been doing since the days when the Mortons owned the property. Tufted Titmice, Blue Jays, Northern Cardinals, nuthatches (White-breasted Nuthatch is pictured), and woodpeckers are among the birds that will approach people at Morton; when we last visited in 2012, a Wild Turkey followed us.



Bring binoculars for observing the wildlife and for the beautiful views where the trail ends at the beach. Established in 1954, the 187-acre Refuge boasts exceptionally diverse habitats, including upland forest, fields, ponds, salt marsh, beach, and lagoon. Much of the Refuge is on a peninsula surrounded by Noyack and Little Peconic Bays.

*Directions:* The Refuge's address is 2595 Noyac(k) Rd., Sag Harbor, NY 11963; phone number 631-286-0485 (for the headquarters at Wertheim NWR). There is a small entrance fee (\$4 per car). Take Sunrise Highway (Route 27) to Southampton and turn left onto North Sea Road (County Road 38) toward North Sea for 2.6 miles. Turn right onto Noyac(k) Road and continue for 5 miles. The Refuge's entrance is on the left.

After our visit, everyone's invited to an optional lunch in downtown Sag Harbor. This event will be canceled in the event of rain, snow, or temperatures below 25°F. Call Joanne at 433-0739 to register in case of a cancellation or for additional info; you can reach her by cell phone on March 14 only (476-3761).



**SSAS COLLEGE SCHOLARSHIPS**

*Betsy Gulotta*

Thanks to the much-appreciated support of longtime member Evelyn Bishop, South Shore Audubon Society is again offering the \$750 Jerry Bishop Environmental Scholarship this spring to college juniors, seniors, or graduate students who are continuing their studies toward a degree in an area of biological or environmental science, such as wildlife management, forestry, animal behavior, ecology, marine biology, oceanography, mammalogy, or ornithology. Our annual college scholarship program began in 1994 and was named in memory of Jerry two years later. For information, call Betsy Gulotta at 546-8841 or send e-mail to [betsy.gulotta@ncc.edu](mailto:betsy.gulotta@ncc.edu). Applications are due by April 30.

All walks start at 9:30 A.M.; no walk if it rains or snows or temperature is below 25°F. Call Joe at 467-9498 in case of questionable conditions or for other info. Directions and lists of what we've seen are at [ssaudubon.org](http://ssaudubon.org).

- Feb. 22 Hempstead Lake State Park (Southern State Parkway Exit 18 south, Field #3)
- Mar. 1 Mill Pond Park (Wantagh/Bellmore, north side of Merrick Rd.)
- Mar. 8 Point Lookout Town Park, S.E. corner
- Mar. 15 Massapequa Preserve (LIRR N.E. lot)
- Mar. 22 Jones Beach West End #2, N.E. corner
- Mar. 29 Alley Pond Park (76th Ave. parking lot)
- Apr. 5 Hempstead Lake State Park (see above)
- Apr. 12 Mill Pond Park (see above)
- Apr. 19 Point Lookout Town Park, S.E. corner
- Apr. 26 Jones Beach West End #2, N.E. corner



RARE BIRD ALERT (212) 979-3070



VOLUNTEERS FOR WILDLIFE (516) 674-0982



**SSAS NOMINATING COMMITTEE**

*Michael Sperling*

In accordance with our bylaws, any member in good standing may suggest candidates for officers and directors for the fiscal year that will begin on July 1, who will be elected during our meeting in May. This is my second year as Nominating Committee chairperson; if you have suggestions (including yourself), please contact me at [mssperling@optonline.net](mailto:mssperling@optonline.net) or 221-3921 (evenings).



Phone: (516) 931-1445  
Fax: (516) 931-1467  
E-Mail: [lgk1cpa@aol.com](mailto:lgk1cpa@aol.com)

**LEONARD G. KONSKER**

CERTIFIED PUBLIC ACCOUNTANT

Konsker and Company, LTD  
550 W. Old Country Rd., Suite 101  
Hicksville, New York 11801



**27TH ANNUAL WATERFOWL SURVEY**

The remaining dates for our five 2014–2015 Waterfowl Surveys, rain or shine, are/were **Saturdays, February 21 and March 21**. Volunteers are welcome to participate. 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 at 481-4208.





## SSAS BACKYARD BIRD SURVEY

For several years, SSAS's Research Committee has been conducting a study to document the bird species found in the SSAS area and to estimate their numbers. We greatly appreciate input from anyone that feeds and/or observes birds in their yard or neighborhood.

To participate, simply record the birds that you see in your yard, neighborhood, or at your feeder; the date, time, and the number or approximate number of each species; and fill in the table provided below. If you have more recordings than lines in the table, please attach an additional piece of paper to the table and submit the additional recordings in the same manner. At the end of each month, please mail or e-mail your record to me at the appropriate address listed below, or hand it to me at our monthly meeting. Additional survey sheets are available at SSAS events.

Please do not hesitate to submit your observations, even if you have been able to make only very few. WE NEED YOUR INPUT! **Town of Hempstead residents who feed birds should contact the Town about its new ordinance.**

---

---

Dates: From \_\_\_\_\_ to \_\_\_\_\_

Date	Time	Species	No.	Date	Time	Species	No.

Submitted by: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone number: \_\_\_\_\_

Please send to: Mr. J. Grupp, Research Chairperson  
660 Edgemere Ave., Uniondale NY 11553  
or  
E-mail: Birdstudyjoeg02@aol.com

---

---

**South Shore Audubon Society**  
**P.O. Box 31**  
**Freeport, NY 11520-0031**

A CHAPTER OF THE NATIONAL AUDUBON SOCIETY

*Americans Committed to Conservation*



PRINTED ON RECYCLED PAPER

**DATED MATERIAL**

WWW.SSAUDUBON.ORG



U.S. POSTAGE  
**PAID**  
 Permit No. 1181  
 NONPROFIT  
 Freeport, NY

**2014-2015 OFFICERS, DIRECTORS, AND  
 COMMITTEE CHAIRPERSONS**

Betty Borowsky, President & Education .....	764-3596
Paul Stessel, Vice President & NAS Liaison .....	295-1137
Joe Landesberg, Treasurer & Field Trips .....	536-4808
Arlene Rawls, Recording Secretary .....	712-9514
Therese Lucas, Corresponding Secretary & Greening of Long Island .....	221-3921
Stacy & Kurt Meyerheinrich, Directors (6/17) .....	796-7411
Emma Carpenter, Director (6/16) .....	637-4901
Richard Kopsco, Director (6/16) & Brookside Preserve .....	825-6792
Mary Colway, Director (6/15) .....	887-0153
Anne Mehlinger, Director (6/15) .....	798-1412
Gail Brown, Hospitality .....	608-1446
Jim Brown, Conservation .....	608-1446
Anne-Marie Conn, Electronic Communications ...	671-7685
Joanne Del Prete, Trip Leader .....	433-0739
John Gaglione, Programs & Birdathon .....	731-5012
Joseph Grupp, Research .....	481-4208
Betsy Gulotta, College Scholarships .....	546-8841
Marilyn Hametz, Publicity .....	799-7189
Wendy Murbach, Membership .....	546-6303
James Remsen, Jr., Birdathon .....	631-957-0949
Dolores Rogers, Welcoming .....	599-1224
Steven Schellenger, NYSOA/Young Birders Liaison .....	987-8103
Michael Sperling, <i>Skimmer</i> Editor .....	221-3921

**BECOME A MEMBER OF SSAS**  
**Think Globally, but Join Locally!**

*Option 1.* You can join SSAS for a year by sending \$20 payable to **South Shore Audubon Society** using the form below. Our address is P.O. Box 31, Freeport, NY 11520-0031.

*Option 2.* To join NAS and your all-volunteer local chapter, you can help SSAS by joining Audubon through us for the same price that it costs if you join through NAS (we get \$0 from these dues 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.



**Renewing?** Please send NAS renewals directly to NAS.



**Donations to SSAS are always welcome! \$\_\_\_\_\_**

Yes, I'd like to join:  SSAS only  National Audubon too

NAME: \_\_\_\_\_

ADDRESS: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_ (Zip+4)

PHONE NO.: \_\_\_\_\_

E-MAIL: \_\_\_\_\_

Chapter Code C5ZR150Z (South Shore Audubon Society)

