# SOUTH SHORE SKIMMER

VOLUME 46, NUMBER 1 — SOUTH SHORE AUDUBON SOCIETY SEPTEMBER 2015

## NEXT MEETING

*Paul Stessel*

**DATE:** Tuesday, September 8, 2015
**TIME:** 7:30 P.M.
**PLACE:** Freeport Memorial Library
144 W. Merrick Rd. (at S. Ocean Ave.)
**SPEAKER:** Joe Giunta
**TOPIC:** The Owls of the New York Area

At our first monthly meeting since May, Joe Giunta will present a slide-illustrated program about the nine species of owls that can be seen in our area. We will find out when and where they can be found, what their lives are like, and what it is about owls that captures birders' imaginations. Emphasis will be placed on Long Island's two breeding species, Great Horned Owl and Eastern Screech-Owl.

Joe, a native New Yorker and frequent SSAS speaker, has been birding the New York City region for over 25 years. A former math teacher and program chairman at Fort Hamilton High School, Joe is the birding instructor for the Brooklyn Botanic Garden. He has led bird walks for The Nature Conservancy, New York City Audubon, Brooklyn Bird Club, and South Fork Natural History Society. He is a captain in the Brooklyn and South Nassau Christmas Bird Counts, and has participated in breeding bird surveys for New York State. An enthusiastic traveler, he has birded extensively in Central and South America. Joe is the owner of Happy Warblers LLC, a birding and educational travel company. Join us!

***Pre-Meeting Book Discussion.*** Arrive a half-hour early to participate in a discussion led by R. U. Abyrdar II (aka Paul Stessel) of the book that he reviewed in the previous Skimmer. This meeting's book is The Thing with Feathers: the Surprising Lives of Birds and What They Reveal About Being Human by Noah Strycker.

***Parking Lots.*** In addition to the parking lot adjacent to the library, there's a lightly used, well-lit, and fairly close municipal lot on the east side of S. Ocean Ave., on the near (south) side of the gas station that borders Sunrise Highway.

IN ORDER TO MINIMIZE WASTE, PLEASE BRING COFFEE MUGS TO OUR MEETINGS.

**SHADE-GROWN COFFEE PROTECTS RAINFORESTS!**

## PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE
### Plastic Bags

*Betty Borowsky*

Welcome to fall (almost)! We are excited to continue our environmental programming, which includes nature-themed presentations at our general meetings (every second Tuesday in the month through May), and our bird walks, which are held primarily within Nassau County, and many other activities. Follow us on our Web site, on Facebook, or in the Yahoo! group, or call committee chairs (their numbers are listed on the last page of every Skimmer). Fall is an exciting time for birders, as the reverse migration brings us many species passing by, including warblers in their winter plumage, and, along about October, innumerable raptors passing by the barrier beaches. So join us!

The world uses an incredibly enormous number of single-use plastic bags. In 2009, the United States International Trade Commission reported that 102 billion plastic bags were used annually in the United States alone.[1] The big question is "what happens to them after they're used? According to the Environmental Protection Agency, about 12% of them are recycled.[2] Other estimates are lower, but let's say that 88% of these bags are not recycled. That's 89,760,000,000 bags that wind up somewhere in the environment.

Sometimes I think they've all landed in the trees and bushes along the parkways, waving around like tattered flags. But, of course, most of them wind up in landfills or are incinerated with other solid wastes. But others are a threat to wildlife. "Aquatic animals such as fish, whales, and seals can be harmed by these bags by ingesting them, choking on them, or be harmed by their toxins. Examples such as the gray whale that was found in West Seattle in

2010 with 20 plastic bags in its stomach highlight this issue.[3]

There is a groundswell of community interest in reducing the impact of plastic bags on the environment. There are two main approaches to this: reduce or eliminate their use, or increase the rate of recycling. Many communities throughout the United States have taken the former, more aggressive approach by issuing local laws banning their use.[4] On Long Island, "Quogue, Southampton, Sag Harbor, Sagaponack, and East Hampton villages have adopted legislation forbidding stores from using them. East Hampton Town also has a ban of its own, which goes into effect later this year."[5]

Overseas, several countries have already discontinued their use or are about to. The Netherlands will ban them entirely by next year.[6]

Nassau County has a plastic bag law, but it takes the latter, more conservative approach, and encourages recycling.[7]

Many years ago I lived in Holland for almost a year. While plastic bags were available at checkout from the supermarket, most shoppers brought their own reusable bags because there was a small charge for bags from the store. I found that this arrangement was no hardship at all. Most of the time I brought my own bags. When, from time to time, I just stopped off at the store on the way home or maybe forgot my own bags, I paid a few cents for the bags to carry the groceries home.

Each community is different, and there are many local as well as global matters that must be taken into consideration when considering a plastic bag ban. But a very brief review of current laws and ordinances at all levels of government reveals that there are so many ways to achieve a real reduction in plastic bag use that I am confident we can devise a plan that will work well in our own area.

[1]"Polyethylene Retail Carrier Bags from Indonesia, Taiwan, and Vietnam" (PDF). p. IV-7. May 2009.

[2]http://www.epa.gov/osw/conserve/materials/plastics.htm.

[3]http://blog.nwf.org/2012/01/the-end-of-the-plastic-bag-in-seattle.

[4]A few are mentioned in http://www.huffingtonpost.com/news/plastic-bag-ban/.

[5]http://www.27east.com/news/article.cfm/Westhampton-Beach-Surrounding-Areas/105659/Westhampton-Beach-Village-Will-Consider-Plastic-Bag-Ban. May 6, 2015.

[6]http://www.plasticsoupfoundation.org/en/2015/03/ban-on-free-plastic-bags-as-from-1-january-next-year.

[7]https://www.nassaucountyny.gov/DocumentCenter/View/3074.

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## FIRE ISLAND WILDERNESS PLAN – IT'S FINALLY HERE!

*Joe Zysman*

*Editor's note:* For many years, SSAS has been part of a coalition led by Joe Zysman of the Fire Island Wilderness Committee. On June 29, he sent us this update.

Nearly ten years in the making, the National Park Service (NPS) and Fire Island National Seashore (FINS) have just released the Fire Island National Seashore's Draft General Management Plan (GMP) and Environmental Impact Statement (EIS). Rather than prepare a separate Wilderness Management Plan, they have folded a Wilderness Stewardship Plan (WSP) into the GMP.

This is the endgame. This is the final draft (including alternatives) that, when approved, will govern how the Fire Island Wilderness Area is to be managed for many decades (the last GMP was completed in 1977; the original Wilderness Management Plan in 1983).

The opportunity to comment on the draft is open until **September 17**. The plan was only released ten days ago and we have just started to go through it in detail. We will be in touch with coalition groups and their representatives in the coming weeks, with our impressions, comments, and suggestions.

Here's a link to the announcement of the release that includes links to download the full GMP (13.4 MB), the WSP (1.6 MB), and the various components/sections of the plan: http://parkplanning.nps.gov/document.cfm?parkID=227&projectID=16782&documentID=66653.

Navigating to the parts involving wilderness is not at all intuitive; the WSP per se is in the self-contained Appendix D, but most of the other components of the GMP also address wilderness and are equally relevant.

FINS also announced two public meetings on the plans [which were held on June 30 in Patchogue and July 25 on Fire Island — ed.].

Also, while we continue to limit our focus to the FINS wilderness, the GMP addresses many other ongoing issues in the rest of the Seashore that most of you likely have interest in. This is the last best chance to pursue those as well.

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**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.*

## 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. 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:

Atlantic Beach..... Robert C. Damico, Anna Maria Testani
Baldwin..... Christine Ann Hirschfeld, Jay Kaplan, Christa Pfeiffer
Bellmore..... Charles Roocke
East Meadow..... Sandra Breiwitz, Robert Gambitsky, Paul Nugget, Katie Sciacca
East Rockaway..... John Tobin
Elmont..... S. Adaikalasamy
Farmingdale ..... Nicole Franzen, Joan Hagner, Jill Vlasak
Floral Park..... Melissa Lotti, Richard Mooney, Margaret Murphy
Freeport..... Clifford Brown, John D'Alessandro, Ellen Schutt
Garden City..... Christine Franklin, Ulla Jorgensen, Seth Kaufman, W. Lockwood, Elizabeth McLaughlin
Hempstead..... Jeanne Yglesias
Hewlett..... Laura & Gary Glabman
Hicksville ..... Grace Gillen, Steven Goldstein, Mary Goodman
Inwood ..... Wayne Lensu
Levittown ..... Thomas V. Harmon, Meridith Jurkowich, Samantha Verini
Long Beach ..... Steven Jacobson, Michael H. Kehrer, Morris Plust, George Tripptree, Cindy Vitere
Lynbrook ..... Kathleen Martingale, Kathy Williamsen
Malverne ..... Anne Gregory, Mark Misiti
Massapequa..... Evan Koegl, Joseph Pollina
Merrick..... Kathleen Crotty, Wendy Paulstich, Phyllis Rothstein, Samuel Wachtel
Oceanside..... Ann Taub
Old Bethpage ..... Steve Rachell
Plainview..... Craig Digianni, Carol Otto, Suzette Sciabarassi–Langman, Paul Shaw, Nancy Tibaldi, William Tillman
Rockville Centre ..... Sarah Berloe, John Campbell, Christine Loomie, Franklin Rothenberg, Marc Santiago
Seaford..... Lawrence Simon
Valley Stream..... Shamima Anis, Jasna Braut-Taormina, Richard Truman, Juanita Uribe
Wantagh ..... John Alberti, Andi & Shana L. Curt, Arthur Kettenbeil, Ladonna Yousha
W Hempstead..... George Charles, P. Kaiteris

## NYS BUDGET AND THE ENVIRONMENT

*Editor's note:* On April 2, shortly before the last *Skimmer* before our summer break was put together, we received the following from Audubon New York's Executive Director, Erin M. Crotty, who is also one of National Audubon Society's vice presidents:

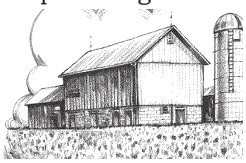
Dear Audubon Chapter Leaders,

The New York Fiscal Year 2015–2016 State Budget has been finalized, and below is a summary Sean developed of the funding and issues of most importance to Audubon. Overall, thanks to your help, we were able to make some progress to improve the health of New York's environment and advance a number of conservation investments that improve the habitats of our priority species. Please don't hesitate to reach out to me or Sean Mahar [Director of Government Relations — ed.] if you have questions or need more details. I want to extend my thanks to Sean for all his hard work (once again) during the maddening budget season.

**$177 Million Environmental Protection Fund (EPF).** The final budget includes a $15 million increase to the EPF, bringing this important fund to $177 million. Under the agreement, several of our supported categories are slated to receive increases, including open space protection; farmland preservation; the Zoos, Botanical Gardens and Aquaria program (ZBGA); invasive species management; and Ocean and Great Lakes conservation (a more detailed chart of all EPF programs is attached). The final budget also includes the authorization for the Biodiversity Stewardship funds to be used for conservation on private lands. While we advocated for a $200 million EPF along with our environmental colleagues, this increase is a positive step and we are appreciative of the new Environmental Conservation Committee Chairs' efforts (Senator Tom O'Mara and Assemblyman Steve Englebright).

**$50 Million Farmland Protection Initiative in the Southern Tier and Hudson Valley.** The final budget also includes the Governor's proposed $50 million farm protection initiative in the Southern Tier and Hudson Valley, to be administered by the Department of Agriculture and Markets. Throughout the negotiations on the budget, we had been working to ensure the $30 million proposed for the Southern Tier region could be used to support

conservation incentives to private landowners. While the final language in the budget does not specifically authorize funding for this purpose, it does direct the Department of Agriculture and Markets to provide grants to landowners and conservation organizations to protect and maintain farms. We will be working with the Department throughout the year on implementation of this program, and continuing to advocate for portions of this funding to advance forest, shrubland, and grassland conservation in the region.



The $20 million dedicated to Hudson Valley farmland protection will go toward the purchase of conservation easements from willing farmers. Farms in Saratoga, Washington, Albany, Rensselaer, Greene, Columbia, Ulster, Dutchess, Sullivan, Orange, Putnam, Rockland, and Westchester Counties will be eligible for this funding, and this is an important investment to preserve agricultural habitat in the Hudson Valley, including areas like the Fort Edward Grasslands IBA [Important Bird Area — ed.].

**$200 Million to Implement the New Water Infrastructure Improvement Act.** The Governor's budget proposal did not include funding for wastewater infrastructure improvements. As a result, we, along with our environmental and construction industry colleagues, mounted a campaign to urge the Senate and Assembly to prioritize this funding. Ultimately, through these collective efforts, $200 million over the next three years has been dedicated to implement the newly created Water Infrastructure Improvement Act, with $50 million available for grants (of up to 60% of the total project cost, with a funding cap of $5 million per grant) to municipalities in the first year.

This new state grant funding is an important initial step in providing grants in addition to zero- and low-interest loans to municipalities to address the estimated $36 billion needed over the next 20 years to upgrade NY's aging water infrastructure and address the water quality impairments it causes. We look forward to building on this investment in the years to come and identifying even more funding to put New Yorkers to work tackling the growing demand for these upgrades. Outside of this proposal, the budget also includes a new $5 million appropriation to develop a nitrogen reduction plan for Long Island to improve water quality.

**NY Works Funding for State Parks.** The final budget includes a $110 million NY Works investment in State Parks infrastructure improvements, a $20 million increase over last year. The funding will provide additional resources to advance natural resource stewardship and restoration projects aligned with the Audubon in the Parks initiative. We will work with State Parks to ensure this happens as the budget is implemented. Outside of the NY Works funding, new EPF funding was provided for capacity-building grants for State Parks friends groups, and we will be working with State Parks to ensure our Audubon chapters, some of which operate as a State Park Friend Group, will be eligible for this funding.

**NY Works DEC Funding.** The final budget includes $8 million for continuation of the access initiative DEC [NYS Department of Environmental Conservation — ed.] started last year to improve infrastructure at, and access to, Wildlife Management Areas (WMAs) and other DEC lands. This funding has supported acquisitions and improvements at places like the Washington County Grasslands IBA in Fort Edward, and in the coming year we will work with DEC to ensure improvements at other BCAs [Bird Conservation Areas] to enhance bird-watching opportunities are prioritized.

Outside of the NY Works program, the final budget includes the Governor's proposed Habitat Conservation and Access Account and commits $1.5 million annually to allow DEC to hire new staff and expand habitat conservation and management activities on WMAs. Initially, this work will focus on an early successional/young forest habitat initiative to facilitate timber management and habitat creation on WMAs in certain focus areas, and we will be continuing to collaborate with DEC on the implementation of this new funding source.

**Climate Smart NY.** The final budget does include a number of investments proposed by the Governor to advance the state's efforts to combat climate change, including new funding in the EPF for Soil and Water Conservation Districts to develop strategies and provide support for New York farmers to improve resiliency and address carbon emissions. The budget also includes continued investments in the Greenbank and other clean energy funding sources, which provide support to renewable energy and energy efficiency projects.

**State Fair Revitalization.** The final budget also includes the $50 million investment in capital improvements to the State Fairgrounds and surrounding areas, as proposed by the Governor, to transform the fairgrounds into a new-age multi-use facility. With its proximity to Onondaga Lake, we will be paying close attention to how this funding is distributed, and ensure that the projects proposed and undertaken benefit the natural resources and birds of this IBA.

**Fort Drum Protection.** The final budget does include funding for the Governor's proposed strategic investments to purchase over 1,300 acres to enhance training efforts around Fort Drum, which will benefit conservation around this Important Bird Area.

**Additional Initiatives.** The final budget also extends the Brownfields and Superfund cleanup programs for 10 years, and provides many reforms to promote cleanup and redevelopment of these contaminated areas. The budget also provides new staff to guide the state's efforts in oil spill planning, response, and prevention, and ensures the solvency of the state's Oil Spill Fund by increasing fees for oil transported through the state.

## ANNUAL CONSERVATION AWARD PRESENTED TO ERIC WELTMAN

*Jim Brown*

At our annual dinner, held on June 9 at the Pompei Restaurant in West Hempstead, the South Shore Audubon Society presented the 2015 Elliott Kutner Conservation Award to Eric Weltman, Senior Organizer at Food and Water Watch. Below are my remarks delivered for the occasion:

The Conservation Award — given annually at our dinner — is named in honor of Elliott Kutner, one of our chapter's founders and past presidents. He led our bird walks for many years and was known throughout Long Island as a great educator when it came to birds. He introduced countless people — myself included — to the joy of birding. Near the end of his life he came to a board meeting — somewhat unexpected as I remember it — and told us that we simply must do more in the way of fighting global warming and climate change. He was really upset that we were not doing more, as the issue was of overriding importance. Elliott was a fabulous educator and committed conservationist, who near the end of his life saw the need for our chapter to take on the crucial issue of global warming.

It is therefore most appropriate that this year we present the Elliott Kutner Conservation Award to Eric Weltman, Senior Organizer at Food and Water Watch. If there is anyone who has worked tirelessly and tenaciously to combat climate change, it is Eric. I've been lucky to have known Eric for several years now and it has been an exciting time as he led a coalition of diverse Long Islanders to combat hydrofracking. South Shore Audubon Society worked with many people and groups — led and motivated by Eric Weltman — to ban fracking in New York State. Eric organized rallies, bus trips to Albany and the fracking fields of Pennsylvania, letter writing and phone campaigns, and the very effective — and always popular! — Cuomo "bird-dogging" activities. Eric is tenacious when it comes to environmental activism. Everywhere Cuomo was, Eric was. Whenever the Governor saw Eric's signature fedora, I'm sure he was saying to himself "That guy with the hat and all those other fracktivists with him just won't quit!" Eric, and the coalition he led, did not give up on demanding a ban to fracking — even when it looked impossible — and we won! Now we are joined — Food and Water Watch, the South Shore Audubon Society, Clean Ocean Action, and many others — in fighting Port Ambrose. Hopefully we will be successful there as well!

Eric Weltman was born in New Jersey and now lives in Brooklyn. He's accomplished many things in his life so far. He's a graduate of the University of Michigan and has a master's degree in urban and environmental policy from Tufts University. He's written for numerous publications — *In These Times, Dollars and Sense*, *The Boston Globe*, and others. He has helped pass legislation, fund programs, and elect candidates. We're happy that Eric has made a Long Island connection as well — to help us successfully take on the critical environmental issues we face. We deeply appreciate Eric's forceful and effective activism!

**And Remember!** Take action to stop Port Ambrose, the Liquefied Natural Gas (LNG) facility proposed for the waters off our South Shore. Port Ambrose will encourage fracking, a dangerous and polluting method of gas drilling; it will present a public safety threat, with explosive gas risking many lives; it will threaten our beaches, ocean ecology, and tourism and fishing industries; and LNG is a fossil fuel that only adds to global warming — Call Governor Cuomo at 866-961-3208 and urge him to VETO PORT AMBROSE!

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## BOOKS FOR BIRDERS

*R. U. Abyrdar II*

Welcome back! Hope your summer is filling with plenty of birds. This season I'm proud to announce the addition of an esteemed colleague who will be collaborating with me on book reviews going forward. Sy Schiff is one of our own and is a renowned varsity-birder. His breadth of knowledge on all things "birdy" will infuse the reviews with a "different" set of eyes. I think you'll like what he brings to these reviews.

To get to the point, our first book is "Tales of a Low-Rent Birder" by Pete Dunne. In 2009, on the Cape May, NJ Hawkwatch platform, Sy met the author himself! One of the stories in this book is entitled "SVAT" and Sy really enjoyed the story. He asked Pete how he came to write the story (ask Sy for Pete's response). And as Sy left the platform, Pete was busy making birders of the onlookers! I can't be making this stuff up!

The author is a past Director of the Cape May Bird Observatory and is a superb author of short pieces of literature. These stories are now 30–40 years old and for the most part are either timeless or are still pertinent, while some seem to have anticipated the birding craze of today.

In these short stories about birds, birding, and birders, Dunne has captured many of the feelings that make our avocation special! Our kind are a sometimes odd, if endearing, group. The author's tales capture this "impression" very well indeed. He sometimes takes our birding propensities to extremes. The story that so fascinated Sy, "SVAT," is only one of these. It is about a hypothetical SVAT team (think SWAT for birds) composed of four quirky (aren't we all... sometimes!) members. OK, read the story yourself!

In another of his abundant stories, "Peregrines Going South for the First Time," he tries to see the world through the eyes of these beautiful birds. His original writing style, along with a true love of both birds and bird-watching, make this book one worth your attention. It's a delight for *all* of us! Anything that Pete writes is easy to read, interesting, and educational — and fascinating. He can pull you into a story, as well as give you all kinds of history to go along with it, all in a conversational tone, as if he were talking to you directly! This book also includes a scattered set of lovely pen and ink illustrations from a young artist/birder (young as in 30–40 years ago), executed years before he was to become famous — none other than David Sibley! Oh yes, and a foreword by none other than Roger Tory Peterson! This is a book for those that enjoy what bird-watching really is all about, not just binoculars and a walk in the park! Read it... and ENJOY!!!

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## 30TH ANNUAL NYS BEACH CLEANUP

Since 1986, the Northeast Chapter of the American Littoral Society has coordinated New York's participation in the annual International Coastal Cleanup, which has the overarching sponsorship of the Ocean Conservancy. Last year, 6800 volunteers removed and collected data on 46 tons of debris from 245 miles of shorelines across NY.

A well-organized beach cleanup is a prime activity for learning about the marine environment — its value to people and wildlife, threats to its productivity, and the actions people can take to improve it.

Visit www.nysbeachcleanup.org for an expanding site list that includes cleanups on **September 19** at Hempstead Lake State Park, Lido Beach, and Jones Beach, and to register your own cleanup. For more information, contact Natalie Grant, NY State Beach Cleanup Coordinator, at nysbc@littoralsociety.org.

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**Lorraine Bondi**

*New York Agent/East Coast Agency Director*

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## BACKYARD SURVEY DATA NEEDED!

*Joe Grupp*

For over a decade, 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. Please do not hesitate to submit your observations, even if you make only very few.

Simply record the date, time, and the number or approximate number of each species. 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. Survey sheets are available at SSAS events and at ssaudubon.org or you can create your own.

Please mail your data to Mr. J. Grupp, Research Chairperson, 660 Edgemere Ave., Uniondale, NY 11553 or email Birdstudyjoeg02@aol.com.

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

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**South Shore Audubon Society**
**P.O. Box 31**
**Freeport, NY 11520-0031**
A CHAPTER OF THE NATIONAL AUDUBON SOCIETY
*Americans Committed to Conservation*

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## 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.

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r **Donations to SSAS are always welcome! $_____**

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

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ADDRESS: _____

_____ (Zip+4)

PHONE NO.: _____

E-MAIL: _____

*Chapter Code C5ZR150Z (South Shore Audubon Society)*

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