

SOUTH SHORE SKIMMER



VOLUME 47, NUMBER 6 — SOUTH SHORE AUDUBON SOCIETY

MARCH 2017

NEXT MEETING

Paul Stessel

DATE: Tuesday, March 14, 2017
TIME: 7:30 P.M.
PLACE: Freeport Memorial Library
144 W. Merrick Rd. (at S. Ocean Ave.)
SPEAKER: Michael S. Scheibel
TOPIC: Eagles on Long Island

The return of the Bald Eagle as a nesting species in the Long Island region and throughout New York State is one of the most successful wildlife restoration stories of our time. Our guest speaker will present the history and current status of Bald Eagles on Long Island, including nest sites, courtship, food preferences, and longevity.

Mike Scheibel has been the Natural Resources Manager for The Nature Conservancy of Long Island at the Mashomack Preserve on Shelter Island since 1996. He received his B.S. degree in wildlife science from Cornell University, and worked for nearly 20 years as a wildlife biologist for the NYS Department of Environmental Conservation, specializing in endangered species projects on Long Island. He helped develop the Long Island Colonial Waterbird Survey in the early 1980s and collected data that led to the listing of the Piping Plover and the Least Tern as endangered in NY. 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 and Sy Schiff reviewed in the previous *Skimmer*. This meeting's book is *Wings for My Flight: The Peregrine Falcons of Chimney Rock* by Marcy Cottrell Houle.

Parking Lots. In addition to the parking lot adjacent to the library, there's a lightly used 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.

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• ☕ IN ORDER TO MINIMIZE WASTE, PLEASE •
• BRING COFFEE MUGS TO OUR MEETINGS. •
• **SHADE-GROWN COFFEE PROTECTS RAINFORESTS!** •
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PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE Perilous Times for the Environment

Betty Borowsky

Regardless of your political affiliation, if you are a member of the Audubon Society (and perhaps even if you are just reading this) you care about birds. And if you care about birds, then you know how important it is to preserve the environment in which they live.

These are perilous times for the environment. While as far as we know nothing has been changed yet, past statements and actions by nominated or newly appointed directors of the federal agencies charged with minimizing environmental pollution, conserving nature, and protecting endangered species suggest that they desire to do just the opposite if they can.

Here are just two recent examples.

① Scott Pruitt has been nominated to be the Director of the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). According to the *Washington Post*, Pruitt has spent much of his energy as attorney general (of Oklahoma) fighting the very agency he has been nominated to lead. Among many other things, the EPA determines the maximum permissible levels of many contaminants that can be permitted in our air and drinking water, including the greenhouse gases associated with global warming.

Editor's interruption: On February 3, first-term Congressman Matt Gaetz (from Florida) introduced H.R. 861, "to terminate the Environmental Protection Agency," with three original cosponsors (Congressmen from Kentucky, Mississippi, and Georgia). The bill has been assigned to four committees for simultaneous consideration (Energy and Commerce; Agriculture; Transportation and Infrastructure; and Science, Space, and Technology); you can follow it at <https://www.congress.gov/bill/115th-congress/house-bill/861>. Four days later, Gaetz introduced a bill "to terminate the Department of Education." His district includes Pensacola; his father is President of the Florida Senate. The EPA was proposed by President Richard Nixon and began operation on December 2, 1970, after Nixon signed an executive order.

BOOKS FOR BIRDERS

Sy Schiff with R. U. Abyrdar II

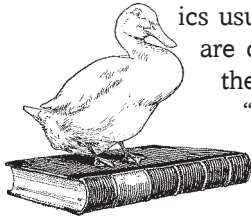
As we begin to move closer to spring, our winter “feel good” raptor stories are giving way to “be a better birder” books! This month our book is *Better Birding: Tips, Tools & Concepts for the Field* by George L. Armistead and Brian L. Sullivan, a book that reveals the techniques expert birders use to identify a wide variety of bird species in the field quickly and easily! It features hundreds of stunning photos and composite plates throughout. It will greatly simplify identification by organizing the birds we see into distinct groupings. These skill-building techniques focus not just on traditional elements such as size, shape, and plumage, but also on creating a context around each bird, including behavior, habitat, and taxonomy — parts of I.D. often glossed over in our typical field guides.

The Introduction outlines the scope and thrust of the book, and covers a number of topics in depth. Two topics usually not otherwise clearly defined are covered with great clarity, namely the difference between “birders” and “birdwatchers,” and “what is a species?” Unless you are a purest, for the most part, the first is of little importance. However, the last is of much controversy. The authors offer competing viewpoints, give some history of past thinking, and present the best of the present thinking on the subject. Do they answer the question? Maybe, but one comes away with a full understanding of where we stand today.

This, of course, leads to a discussion of taxonomy — what it is and how it is determined — which leads to the viewpoints of the “lumpers” and “splitters.” Both are discussed and my impression is that the authors believe the “lumpers” have a better case. Lumping is on much firmer ground. Splitting is finding a place in a moving target, namely evolution, and whether it has happened in sufficient detail yet. If their analysis is correct, we could be looking for a number of lumps, some of which are already under way (redpolls and perhaps sharp-tailed sparrows).

The book is organized differently than most books on the subject. It covers 20 select groups of birds as a unit that are closely allied and that present I.D. challenges within each group. Can you use the information to I.D. birds in the field? No! The information is covered in great detail with lots of photographs. No bird is going to hang out long enough for you to review the information. The idea is to present you with the wherewith to study the group in advance, to know what is important, and to advance your knowledge. A few examples of what’s what are given below.

All of the white herons are covered in great detail and each species is covered separately. So, you have all this detail in your head and you run through it when you see a bird. But, while the field guides tell you what and where to



look at to get an I.D., here you need to look at the whole bird and get a match on an entire image.

The I.D. section on longspurs covers the drab fall and winter plumages, since the breeding birds are quite striking. The four North American species are quite similar in appearance, difficult to see in the habitat they occur in, and extremely wary. There is a certain amount of plumage variation and some overlap. Detail of some makes it difficult to come to grips with how to pick out a rarity and how to I.D. it. (The tail patterns are all unique and very difficult to see, but this detail is not specifically mentioned.)

If I [Sy] seem to be picky, that’s because I was looking for something that the book is not. It’s a wonderful overview of species that require information on plumage, habitat, etc. It is also a great addition to knowledge of groups not often encountered, such as murrelets, petrels, and cowbirds. As an armchair book, I give it very high marks. Read it; you will learn a lot. If you get a decent photo of a rare bird, this book is the place to go to verify the picture.

Read it... and ENJOY!

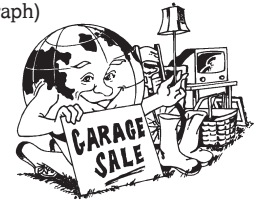


GARAGE SALE – HELPERS AND STUFF NEEDED!

For the first time in nine years, SSAS has a garage sale on its calendar — for **Saturday, April 8**, with a rain date of the 15th. Please save things for us! If you can’t bring your items to the Youngferts’ home in Franklin Square when it’s time for the sale, we will help get your items there. Donations are tax-deductible.

Items that are popular at garage sales on Long Island include the following:

- Books
- Small pieces of furniture
- Small appliances (please see next paragraph)
- Craft supplies
- House plants
- Assorted decorative items
- Tools
- Kitchen equipment
- Seasonal and holiday items
- Pet supplies (fish tanks, dog bowls, etc.)



Please note that we’re not looking for encyclopedia sets, Reader’s Digest condensed books, baby equipment, and any small appliances that are not working. If you have small appliances to donate, they should have the booklet (or a note about where it can be downloaded for free online) and all other parts, and, of course, be clean. We will have an area set up where appliances can be tested before being sold.

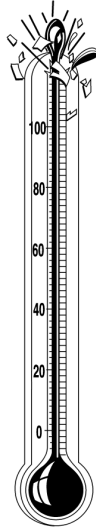


Volunteers will be needed to pick up, drop off, and/or sell items. They will also be needed on the day before the sale to help set up, and afterwards to help pack up unsold things to donate to other organizations. To volunteer, please write to Nancy at nyoungfert@aol.com.

LESSONS FROM THE ECUADORIAN RAINFOREST AND SOME PERSONAL THOUGHTS ON THE FIGHT AGAINST GLOBAL WARMING

Jim Brown

As most people are now aware, global warming has reached alarming levels. Arctic sea ice and the Greenland ice sheet are rapidly disappearing. A loss of these huge areas of reflective ice and the concomitant increase in dark, heat-absorbing ocean water may create a tipping point causing catastrophic and irreversible climate changes. If current trends do not improve, methane, a greenhouse gas much more potent than carbon dioxide, would also be released in large amounts throughout the melting tundra of the Northern Hemisphere, creating a further, even more rapid warming of the planet. To avert climate disaster, our use of fossil fuels must change, and change quickly. Carbon — oil, gas, and coal — must be left unburnt in the ground if we are to solve this human-created problem in time. We are unfortunately currently on track to see earth’s temperature increase by more than 2 degrees Celsius (3.6 degrees Fahrenheit), enough to cause irreversible climate changes. We are losing the fight against global warming; when exactly the fight will be over is currently not known but our trajectory toward failure — without deep, far-reaching changes — seems clear.



What is to be done? A recent article published by the National Audubon Society (“A Pipeline Runs Through It,” by Tom Clynes, *Audubon*, Winter 2016) is instructive. Clynes investigates the issue revolving around the attempts to prevent oil exploration in the rich, biodiverse Amazon region of eastern Ecuador. What has happened so far in Ecuador is roughly as follows: The president, Rafael Correa, with much popular support following his election in 2006, attempted to obtain funds from the international community in exchange for not pursuing oil exploration and development in the Yasuni region of his country, one of the most productive and biologically diverse rainforests in the world — a carbon sink of international importance as well as being a beautiful, pristine ecosystem. Ecuador was seeking \$3.6 billion, which was roughly half of the amount of money the country would have received for the oil. Initially there was much hope that this important piece of rainforest could be saved from development, and that Ecuador would also receive funds for important economic and social programs without having to rely on additional fossil fuel extraction.

This attempted “pay-to-preserve” initiative ultimately failed for a variety of reasons. European nations backed off because they were not granted the control over the funds that they felt entitled to, and oil companies, powerful in Ecuador, seemed to have convinced the Ecuadorian president that oil development would be good for

the country. Despite widespread and strong opposition, Correa has gone ahead with oil development in the Yasuni region. Scientists and indigenous people in the area have already noticed a decline in the wildlife, as development of oil extraction infrastructure has begun in the region. Ecuador now also finds itself deeply in debt to China for the money it borrowed to undertake the oil exploration and development, and for social and economic programs. An upcoming national election may or may not change current Ecuadorian policy regarding oil development in the Yasuni region.

To me this Ecuadorian story seems like a missed opportunity, an opportunity to win a battle in the fight against global warming. We also may have lost an opportunity to save an important and beautiful rainforest. Nevertheless, what has transpired in Ecuador points us to important elements that are needed to combat global warming and climate change. Funds will necessarily have to flow from the developed nations, the richer nations of the earth, to the poorer countries, so they will be able to protect important environmental resources while at the same time providing a decent life for their people. Also, the power of fossil fuel corporations to control the trajectory of economic and social development throughout the world will have to be eliminated. Blind, short-term profit-seeking through fossil fuel extraction must cease if we are to survive this climate crisis.

Achieving these goals will not be easy. United States policy on climate change is critically important globally. Previous U.S. political administrations, strongly influenced by the fossil fuel industry’s wealth and power, were ineffective as they dragged their feet regarding the issue of global warming. The current one is actually engaged in climate change denial. A radically new direction is needed, and fast.



BIRD WALKS
Joe Landesberg

All walks start at **9 A.M.**; no walk if it rains or snows or temperature is below 25°F. Call me at 467-9498 in case of questionable conditions or for other info. Directions and lists of what we’ve seen are at ssaudubon.org.

- Feb. 26 Mill Pond Park (Wantagh/Bellmore, north side of Merrick Rd.)
- Mar. 5 Alley Pond Park (76th Ave. parking lot)
- Mar. 11 (Sat.) Marine Nature Study Area, Oceanside
- Mar. 19 Hempstead Lake State Park (Southern State Parkway Exit 18 south, Field #3)
- Mar. 26 Mill Pond Park (see above)
- Apr. 2 Norman J. Levy Park and Preserve
- Apr. 9 Massapequa Preserve (LIRR N.E. lot)
- Apr. 15 (Sat.) Marine Nature Study Area, Oceanside
- Apr. 23 Hempstead Lake State Park (see above)
- Apr. 30 Jones Beach West End #2, N.E. corner

