SOUTH SHORE SKIMMER

VOLUME 47, NUMBER 5 — SOUTH SHORE AUDUBON SOCIETY FEBRUARY 2018

NEXT MEETING

Paul Stessel & Bill Belford

DATE: Tuesday, February 13, 2018
TIME: 7:30 P.M.
PLACE: Freeport Memorial Library
144 W. Merrick Rd. (at S. Ocean Ave.)
SPEAKER: Scott Joshua Dere
TOPIC: The Art of Photographing Birds

Our guest speaker for February has been using a camera since he was five and landed his first photography job at age 13. During the next 17 years, he worked with professional studios and received a BFA in the Fine Arts of Photography from the School of Visual Arts in Manhattan. He has a Master of Photography medal from the Professional Photographers of America, has his own professional studio in Cedarhurst, and is the president of the Professional Photographers of Greater New York.

In the last 20 years, Scott has had the opportunity to photograph many celebrities and to work alongside some of the best nature photographers in Minnesota, Alaska, Wyoming, and Kenya. For the last 10 years, Scott has produced many published works for his project "The Elements of Nature" by traveling in between weekend events to create some amazing nature images.

At our meeting, Scott will discuss how to make the sharpest images possible while photographing birds in the wild using super telephoto lenses. He will present techniques used on his own equipment while giving a slide-show presentation of his best images of raptors and other birds. Tips will be given on how to approach birds of prey and how to compose the best images of them. Scott will reveal how to use proper exposures and post-processing methods to obtain the perfect finished image.

You can see (and buy) some of his nature photos at http://scottderephotography.com/Portfolios and http://theelementsofnature.com. Included in his SSAS presentation will be photos of Northern Hawk Owls that he took early this winter in Minnesota. Join us!

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!

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.*

HELP DEFEND THE MIGRATORY BIRD TREATY ACT

Editor's note: This article is excerpted from www.audubon.org/news/department-interior-guts-enforcement-migratory-bird-treaty-act. SSAS has signed onto a letter urging Congress to defend the MBTA.

In December, the Department of the Interior released an interpretation of the Migratory Bird Treaty Act that eliminates its ability to hold industries accountable for bird deaths. Reversing decades of practice by administrations under both political parties, this legal opinion drastically limits the law and puts hundreds of species of birds at greater risk.

Passed in 1918 with leadership from Audubon and chapters across the nation, the MBTA protects nearly all of our country's native birds from being killed without a permit. Millions of birds die from preventable causes such as oil waste pits, oil spills, electric transmission lines, and more. The MBTA provides a critical incentive for industries to implement common-sense practices that save birds' lives. It also ensures that responsible parties are held accountable for events that kill significant numbers of birds. For instance, if this interpretation had been in place after the Gulf [of Mexico] oil spill, BP would have been off the hook for

killing one million birds and would not have been required to pay a $100 million fine that is helping restore bird habitat.

The opinion has been strongly criticized in a new letter from former high-ranking officials in the Department of the Interior under Democratic and Republican administrations. This move, along with Congressional threats [see the last *Skimmer*], will put more than 1,000 species of birds at risk, and Audubon will fight tooth and nail to uphold these vital protections. You can take action by writing to the Department of the Interior and Congress at our Action Center (www.audubon.org/takeaction).

WHALE WATCHING ON LONG ISLAND

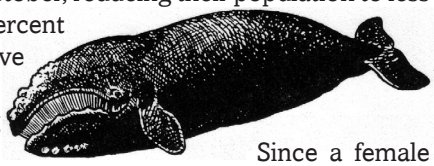
Brien Weiner

Seeing the news of a humpback whale washed up on Atlantic Beach at the end of December was sobering punctuation to a year of magnificent sightings of whales off the Long Beach strip.

To some extent, the return of whales to the New York Bight, the body of water that stretches from Montauk to Cape May, is a success story. Pollution and overfishing drove them from the area decades ago, but cleaner water and catch limits on menhaden, put in place in 2012, have led to their return as they follow the food. Some marine biologists say that the explanation is not so simple, however, and that the increase in menhaden and whales may have more to do with climate change and shifting ocean currents. Moreover, the return of the whales places them in harm's way of collisions and noise from shipping lanes and wind turbines, and entanglements in fishing gear.

In the last 18 months, at least 54 humpback whales have died along the Eastern seaboard from Maine to North Carolina. On average, the number of deaths from strandings and collisions in a given year is 10. Although there is no firm explanation for what marine biologists are calling an "unusual mortality event," they suspect the deaths are largely caused by collisions with ships. At least 10 of the whales showed evidence of blunt force trauma and deep propeller cuts. As to why the whales are increasingly coming into contact with ships, scientists worry that the humpbacks may have been forced to range widely in a search for food as the seas grow rapidly warmer and their feeding grounds are disturbed.

The situation with the North Atlantic right whale (pictured) is even more dire. Fifteen right whales died between April and October, reducing their population to less than 450. Eighty percent of right whales have scars from ship strikes and fishing entanglements. Since a female whale generally produces one calf every 1–3 years, the death of an individual has consequences for the species as a whole.



Nevertheless, sightings of whales in our area have been thrilling New Yorkers in recent years, although many residents are unaware how close they are to our shoreline. Whale-watching trips on the American Princess, which offers four-hour trips out of Riis Landing in the Rockaways from May to November, feature humpback whales breaching, lunge-feeding, tail- and fin-slapping, diving, and logging next to the boat, and often bottlenose dolphins doing much the same, with the New York City skyline as a backdrop. Six-hour trips run by CRESLI (Coastal Research and Education Society of Long Island) out of Montauk in July and August produce sightings of fin, minke, and humpback whales, along with various dolphins, sea turtles, sharks, pelagic birds, and other denizens of a world apart from, although increasingly in conflict with, ours. One trip even encountered two right whales.

Fin whales, while not as playful as humpbacks, are the second largest animal ever to have lived, after the blue whale. They are the "greyhounds of the sea," sleek and up to 80+ feet long, surfacing like submarines, and traveling underwater at speeds over 25 knots. It is not uncommon to find them feeding together in groups of 3–20 with cow–calf pairs, and sometimes circle feeding, in which a group swims in a tightening circle to trap fish. There are approximately 200–400 fin whales in New York waters year-round. Minke whales, at 30 feet long, look like smaller versions of fin whales, and are the third most abundant whale in our area.

Humpback whales can reach lengths of 60 feet. Their abundance in the New York Bight varies widely. As in other whales, they are not truly "social" but may feed in groups. Humpback whales have distinctive markings on the underside of their tails or flukes, and various institutions keep catalogs of fluke photographs that are used to track the whales. Atlantic humpback whales migrate from wintering grounds in the Caribbean to more northern latitudes. In 2016 I had the pleasure of seeing the same humpback whale in June off the Rockaways, and in July off Montauk, identified by its fluke. (The Montauk trip was highlighted by 11 fin whales, including 2 cow–calf pairs.)

The North Atlantic right whale, the fin whale, and certain populations of the humpback whale are listed as endangered by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. I urge readers to see these magnificent animals while we can. And for birders, the Montauk trips produce Wilson's Storm-Petrels; Cory's, Greater, Manx, and Sooty Shearwaters; Black and Roseate Terns; and, last year, South Polar Skua and Parasitic Jaeger.

For those who may go whale watching on their own boats, be sure to follow the guidelines for proper distance and speed issued by the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA). And when birding from the shore, scan for breaching or blow — you may be rewarded with sightings of humpback or fin whales or dolphins anywhere from the Rockaways to Montauk.

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. Check **www.facebook.com/SSAudubon** (you don't need to have a Facebook account) for cancellations, changes, and lists from recent walks. Directions and lists of what we've seen in recent years are at **www.ssaudubon.org**.

Jan. 28	Point Lookout Town Park, S.E. corner (and Lido Preserve afterwards)
Feb. 4	Jones Beach West End #2, N.E. corner
Feb. 11	Massapequa Preserve (LIRR N.E. lot)
Feb. 18	Massapequa Lake*
Feb. 25	Mill Pond Park (Wantagh/Bellmore, north side of Merrick Rd.)
Mar. 4	Hempstead Lake State Park (Southern State Parkway Exit 18 south, Field #3)
Mar. 11	Alley Pond Park (76th Ave. parking lot)

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

JOIN THE GREAT BACKYARD BIRD COUNT

The 21st annual Great Backyard Bird Count will take place from **Friday, February 16**, to **Monday, February 19**. In 2017, GBBC participants in more than 100 countries counted more than 6,200 species of birds on more than 180,000 checklists. The GBBC is led by the Cornell Lab of Ornithology and the National Audubon Society with Canadian partner Bird Studies Canada. The program's Web site can be found at **birdcount.org**.

Because the GBBC has been merged with the eBird online checklist program, anyone with an Internet connection can take part, even through a mobile device. All ages and skill levels are very welcome – if you can identify a single species of bird we want to hear from you.

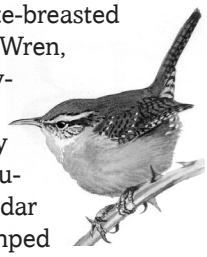
Though it's called the Great *Backyard* Bird Count, you can count birds anywhere — at a nearby park, nature center, your schoolyard, or neighborhood — anywhere you find birds!

You can count at any location for at *least* 15 minutes, but you're welcome to watch much longer than that. Keep track of the total amount of time you spend watching and roughly how far you walked if you're hiking. Please make your best estimate of the number of individuals of each species you saw. For instance, if you're watching at a feeder and see three chickadees, then four chickadees, then one chickadee, you would report them as four chickadees, not eight.

Create a separate bird checklist for each day you participate. Submit a separate checklist for each new location, even if it's on the same day. You can submit multiple checklists on the same day from the same location if the two counts were at different times — early morning and late afternoon, for example.

If you are new to the count or have not participated since before 2013, you'll first be asked to create a free GBBC account. If you already have an account for the GBBC, eBird, or another Cornell Lab citizen-science project, please use that same username and password to log in.

In 2017, New York birders reported 177 species, including the following 121 in Nassau County: Snow Goose, Pink-footed Goose, Brant, Cackling Goose, Canada Goose, Mute Swan, Wood Duck, Northern Shoveler, Gadwall, Mallard, American Black Duck, Northern Pintail, Green-winged Teal, Ring-necked Duck, Greater Scaup, Lesser Scaup, Common Eider, Harlequin Duck, Surf Scoter, White-winged Scoter, Black Scoter, Long-tailed Duck, Bufflehead, Common Goldeneye, Barrow's Goldeneye, Hooded Merganser, Common Merganser, Red-breasted Merganser, Ruddy Duck, Red-throated Loon, Common Loon, Pied-billed Grebe, Horned Grebe, Northern Gannet, Great Cormorant, Double-crested Cormorant, American Bittern, Great Blue Heron, Great Egret, Black-crowned Night-Heron, Turkey Vulture, Northern Harrier, Sharp-shinned Hawk, Cooper's Hawk, Red-tailed Hawk, American Coot, American Oystercatcher, Black-bellied Plover, Killdeer, Ruddy Turnstone, Sanderling, Dunlin, Purple Sandpiper, Greater Yellowlegs, Razorbill, Bonaparte's Gull, Ring-billed Gull, Herring Gull, Great Black-backed Gull, Rock Pigeon, Mourning Dove, Eastern Screech-Owl, Great Horned Owl, Snowy Owl, Long-eared Owl, Northern Saw-whet Owl, Belted Kingfisher, Red-headed Woodpecker, Red-bellied Woodpecker, Yellow-bellied Sapsucker, Downy Woodpecker, Hairy Woodpecker, Northern Flicker, American Kestrel, Merlin, Peregrine Falcon, Monk Parakeet, Blue Jay, American Crow, Fish Crow, Common Raven, Horned Lark, Tree Swallow, Black-capped Chickadee, Tufted Titmouse, Red-breasted Nuthatch, White-breasted Nuthatch, Brown Creeper, Winter Wren, Carolina Wren (pictured), Ruby-crowned Kinglet, Eastern Bluebird, Hermit Thrush, American Robin, Gray Catbird, Northern Mockingbird, European Starling, American Pipit, Cedar Waxwing, Snow Bunting, Yellow-rumped Warbler, American Tree Sparrow, Chipping Sparrow, Field Sparrow, Fox Sparrow, Dark-eyed Junco, White-crowned Sparrow, White-throated Sparrow, Song Sparrow, Swamp Sparrow, Eastern Towhee, Northern Cardinal, Red-winged Blackbird, Brown-headed Cowbird, Rusty Blackbird, Common Grackle, Boat-tailed Grackle, House Finch, Purple Finch, American Goldfinch, and House Sparrow. The location for the highest 2017 GBBC count for each of these in Nassau County is at ebird.org.



BOOK REVIEW – WESLEY THE OWL

Frank Scoblete

Last things first — I cried. Wesley the owl died at the end of the book at the age of 19. I am not ashamed to admit I cried. Thirty years ago I would have been sneering at my tearing, but in the last 22 years I have had two parrots as pets (both still alive) and I know the close relationship that a human and a bird (perhaps all pets and people) can have.

My older bird, Augustus, came close to death about five years ago. My wife (the Beautiful AP) and I were shattered. I never thought that could happen to me; my lord, I was sad because of a bird? Yes, I was. Augustus was a part of my family; he is still a part of my family.

Stacey O'Brien has written a masterful tale, *Wesley the Owl*, of her 19 years with a Barn Owl who would have died in the wild because he started his life with a broken wing. If owls can't fly, they die. Stacey had a choice; adopt the owl or know that she had consigned him to oblivion. Stacey is a biologist specializing in wild animal behavior. She adopted the owl.

Of course, she had to figure out how to feed it (loads and loads of mice) and take care of it in the confines of an indoor life. Wesley had some very strong ideas about how he wanted to live — one way was without other males coming near his "mate." Wesley was jealous of "suitors." In that he was much like the Greek hero Odysseus who, after his return from a 20-year adventure, killed his supposedly widowed wife's suitors.

Despite the word "barn" in the owl's name, it is an outdoor creature that might only very, very occasionally wind up in someone's barn for some strange reason or other.

Wesley the Owl is a personal tale. Stacey suffered from migraines which became so bad that she would pass out. Ultimately, she was diagnosed with a brain tumor, then a stroke, and wound up in a wheelchair. She seriously thought of suicide. What held her hand? Let her tell you:

"Wesley had been my constant companion, my teacher, and my friend. I now made the decision to honor this little body with the huge soul, and to see him through to the end. I had promises to keep. It was the one thing I could still do. It's the Way of the Owl. You commit for life, you finish what you start, you give your unconditional love, and that is enough. I looked into the eyes of the owl, found the word of God there, and decided to live."

I just gave my two birds kisses. These are birds I love. Stacey loved Wesley. Read the book; I think you will enjoy it.

Editor's note: Frank and his wife Alene shared their writing and speaking talents with us at SSAS's January member's night meeting. Frank, the author of 35 books and a growing collection of "Bird Scobe" articles, invites you to check out www.frankscoblete.com.

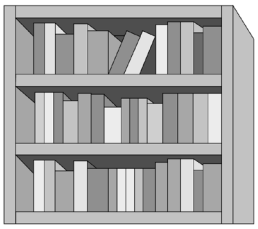
30TH ANNUAL WATERFOWL SURVEY

The remaining dates for our 2017–2018 Waterfowl Survey are as follows, weather permitting: **Saturdays, February 3, February 24,** and **March 24**. Members 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 SSAS's Bill Belford at 385-1759.

NEW NATURE BOOKS AT THE FREEPORT MEMORIAL LIBRARY

SSAS has been holding its meetings in Freeport's public library since the 1970s. We've been making donations to the library for decades, asking that the money be spent on nature-themed items (books and, more recently, videos) and that a bookplate identifying us be added. These items are available for interlibrary loan. Our 2017 donation was spent on the following books for adults and children:

- *American Birding Association Field Guide to the Birds of New Jersey* by Rick Wright
- *The Most Perfect Thing: Inside (and Outside) a Bird's Egg* by Tim Birkhead
- *A Feathered River Across the Sky: The Passenger Pigeon's Flight to Extinction* by Joel Greenberg
- *The Genius of Birds* by Jennifer Ackerman
- *Peterson Reference Guide to Birding by Impression* by Kevin T. Karlson & Dale Rosselet
- *Rare Birds of North America* by Steve N. G. Howell, Ian Lewington & Will Russell
- *What a Fish Knows* by Jonathan Balcombe
- *The Songs of Trees* by David George Haskell
- *Hummingbirds: A Life-size Guide to Every Species* by Michael Fogden, Marianne Taylor & Sheri L. Williamson
- *The Thing with Feathers: The Surprising Lives of Birds and What They Reveal About Being Human* by Noah Strycker
- *Identifying Birds of Prey: Quick Reference Guide for Eastern North America* by Laura Erickson
- *Falcon* by Helen Macdonald
- *American Birding Association Field Guide to Birds of New York* by Corey Finger



- *Peterson Field Guide to Bird Sounds of Eastern North America* by Nathan Pieplow
- *A Field Guide to Long Island Sound* by Patrick J. Lynch
- *Peterson Reference Guide to Woodpeckers of North America* by Stephen A. Shunk
- *National Wildlife Federation's World of Birds: A Beginner's Guide* by Kim Kurki
- *National Geographic Kids: Everything Birds of Prey* by Blake Hoena
- *Everything You Need to Know About Birds* by Smithsonian/DK
- *Circle* by Jeannie Baker

BOOKS FOR BIRDERS

R. U. Abyrdar II with Sy Schiff

This month's book is where the "bird story" begins — in the nest! *Into the Nest: Intimate Views of the Courting, Parenting and Family Lives of Familiar Birds* by Laura Erickson and Marie Read, with support from the Cornell Lab of Ornithology, is an important companion to your field guide. It offers a rare glimpse into the breeding and nesting cycles of some of our most familiar birds — from raptors and hummingbirds to woodpeckers and wrens. Now Sy offers his opinion and review:

This book pretty much covers the topic in its subtitle. Part 1 examines the Facts of Bird Life (Courting and Mating, Enter the Egg, and Nesting and Parenting). This short beginning covers in exquisite very brief detail everything from the chicken to the egg and back. It is accompanied by lovely photographs illustrating the points discussed.

There is a complete discussion of precocial and altricial nestlings, and how they survive. This is the period when the newly hatched imprint on their mothers and why one should never pick up young birds. Just put them back in the nest or hide them in a close bush.

After the above, Part 2 proceeds to a detailed look of the life history of a representative of the bird families chosen. The first bird covered is a duck, the Mallard. I learned that when the male Mallard jumps on a female in the water, he's not defending territory or chasing the bird away. Mallards prefer to use the water rather than the land. It's hard to escape in the water. So far, no hen has complained to the authorities.

Twenty-five families are covered and in some cases more than one bird per family. All are familiar birds, from the Mallard to the American Goldfinch. The shorebirds are represented by the Killdeer; a logical choice since the bulk of shorebirds breed in the far Arctic. Almost all the land birds are familiar local breeders, including Mourning Doves, chickadees, House Wrens, bluebirds, and American Robins.

When two species are closely related and rear their young in similar fashion, they are treated together with any differences clearly noted. For example, Downy and Hairy Woodpeckers both nest in cavities. The ins and outs of cavity nesting are explored and described.

Each bird is lavishly illustrated, from nest, eggs, newly hatched, feeding, to fledglings. The story stops at this point. Adults are not the thrust of this book. The pictures show aspects of bird life not often seen and then only in special cases such as this book.

Part 3 is a series of small maps showing the breeding, migrating, and winter range of the described species, so that you know where they are in case you want to look for them. Also included are nesting facts: clutch size, eggshell color, broods per season, and a cross reference to the page number of the species' account.

This is a different kind of book, fully describing in detail an aspect of bird life and behavior not found elsewhere. You'll learn all about fidelity, who does the work of rearing the young, who defends the nest, and how the young cope and mature.

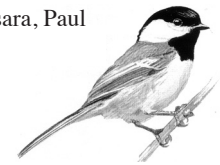
If you're a lister, "who cares?" But if you want to increase your knowledge of birds, this is an indispensable book.

R. U.'s conclusion: As Sy opines, this is an indispensable read! Enjoy!!

WELCOME NEW MEMBERS

Wendy Murbach

Our new members since the last *Skimmer* are:



Bellmore..... Steven & Clare Cassara, Paul Tzinivis
Elmont..... Laura Scheer
Floral Park..... R. Snyder
Franklin Square..... Karen Wright
Freeport..... Irene J. Buszko
Garden City..... Geraldine De Leo, Howard W. Isenberg
Massapequa..... Helen Cirami
Plainview..... Loretta Rinaldo
Seaford..... Cathy Lahm

NAT'L AUDUBON MEMBERSHIP STATUS (844) 428-3826

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

Wild Birds Unlimited
Nature Shop

Syosset Plaza
625 Jericho Turnpike
Syosset, NY 11791 (516) 226-1780

www.wbu.com/syosset
FB: Wild Birds Unlimited of Syosset NY

BIRDSEED·FEEDERS·BIRDBATHS·OPTICS·GIFTS
GREETING CARDS·WALL ART·TILLEY HATS
SILVER FOREST EARRINGS·GARDEN ACCENTS

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"DRILL, BABY, DRILL!" – ADMINISTRATION PLANS TO GREATLY EXPAND OIL AND GAS DRILLING OFF ALL OUR COASTS

Jim Brown

The expression "Drill, baby, drill!," made famous by 2008 Vice Presidential candidate Sarah Palin, became an infamous statement following the Deepwater Horizon oil spill in 2010. This exhortation to drill for ever-increasing amounts of oil and gas is unfortunately still with us. BOEM (Bureau of Ocean Energy Management), the bureau of Ryan Zinke's Interior Department responsible for energy leases in the Outer Continental Shelf (OCS), recently announced that the U.S. will be greatly expanding the number of fossil fuel leases off our coasts — all of them. Forty-seven lease sales are planned for the period 2019–2024, covering more than a billion acres, which amounts to 90% of all the land of our entire OCS. Nineteen lease sales are planned for Alaska. Six of these leases are planned for the Arctic Ocean's Alaskan seas, the Beaufort and the Chukchi. Other sections of the country that have been exempted in past leasing programs — the Pacific coast, the Atlantic OCS — are now included. The waters surrounding Florida were originally included in the plan, but were withdrawn within days of the announcement — perhaps illegally — when the state's Republican Governor and Trump ally Rick Scott complained. The huge chilling and audacious scope of this "2019–2014 National Outer Continental Shelf Oil and Gas Leasing Program" clearly shows that the current administration in Washington wants nothing more than to "drill, baby, drill!"

Environmental organizations have responded immediately to protest the far-reaching January 4th BOEM announcement. Some examples of the strong opposition: Greenpeace responded within hours of the announcement: "We need to fight this tooth and nail at every level of government, starting by flooding the Interior Department with public comments." Surfrider Foundation urged people to "make sure our federal representatives oppose this terrible plan by flooding their phones and inboxes." All Our Energy, a Long Island environmental advocacy organization, stated that "Apparently your ocean (yes, including the Atlantic) is being made great again for gas and oil drilling, spills, pollution and everything else that comes with it… We will be opposing this at every possible turn and will be joining with our allies to bring the public together to stop this." The National Audubon Society stated in its own Action Alert that "Expanding lease sales to sensitive marine areas off the Arctic, Atlantic and Pacific coasts threatens critical bird habitat as well as the economic viability of hundreds of coastal communities."

Many governors of the targeted coastal states, Republican and Democratic, are also strongly opposed to the possibility of expanded drilling. Governor Cuomo has e-mailed New Yorkers a request to sign a petition to "Say No to Offshore Drilling off New York's Coast": "This should outrage all New Yorkers. Our beautiful coastline is crucial to the state's economy. What's more outrageous is that Florida has been given an exemption from this offshore drilling decision after a bipartisan outcry. If Florida gets an exemption, then New York should too."

The U.S. government is withdrawing from the Paris climate accord. Congress has passed (and Trump has signed) a tax bill that includes the opening up of the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge for fossil fuel drilling. And now this offshore drilling plan has been proposed, yet another potentially huge gift to the fossil fuel industry. The world is experiencing horrific impacts from global warming. Phenomena such as strong hurricanes, wildfires, floods, desertification, species endangerment, rising sea levels, loss of glacial ice, social unrest, immigration, and war are all linked to the climate crisis we are experiencing. To pursue a fossil fuel drilling program such as the one BOEM just announced is irresponsible. Added to its undeniable negative climate change impacts, expanded drilling also needlessly endangers our shorelines, wildlife, and coastal communities with the threat of accidents and spills.

All South Shore Audubon members and friends are urged to follow this important issue and to take action to combat this new misguided fossil fuel initiative as the industry attempts to move it forward. At this time comments can be sent to BOEM, via the National Audubon Society, in opposition to their plan and in support of our imperiled environment: https://act.audubon.org/onlineactions/e_Vm3cJ1d0WzmFBz_TQ2sA2.

Editor's note: Last year, a coalition of conservation and Alaskan native groups filed a still-pending lawsuit in response to President Trump's April 2017 executive order reversing the Obama Administration's permanent protections for the Arctic and Atlantic Oceans from offshore drilling. See https://earthjustice.org/cases/2017/challenging-trump-s-reversal-of-arctic-and-atlantic-drilling-ban for details.

TACKAPAUSHA – WINTER AND SPRING

Marilyn Hametz

Many thanks to all the SSAS volunteers at the Tackapausha Children's Holiday Party on Saturday, December 9: Kathi Berlin, Betty Borowsky, Gail and Jim Brown, Helen Buckley, Rich Kopsco, and Anne Mehlinger. In spite of snow falling, many children and adults attended and enjoyed the animals, crafts, museum, and snacks.

Beginning in the spring, we will be involved in a new project with Tackapausha. With a collaborative grant that South Shore Audubon was awarded from the National Audubon Society, new native plants will be added to the Tackapausha wildlife garden and publications encouraging the use of native plants in gardens will be distributed.

INVASION OF THE SNOWY OWLS

Brien Weiner

The winter of 2017–2018 is proving to be an irruptive one for Snowy Owls in our area. As evidenced by Christmas Bird Counts and numerous sighting reports, they have been found along the barrier beaches from Brooklyn to Montauk (including Jones Beach, Long Beach, and Jamaica Bay). These birds defy the general concept of an owl with their preference for beaches and airports to woodlands, their diurnal as opposed to nocturnal hunting, and, of course, their striking white color. The mystery that surrounds these owls draws a paparazzi of birders, photographers, Harry Potter fans, and the general public. If you see viewers getting too close to, chasing, or otherwise harassing these birds, please remind them that they are long-distance visitors and stress reduces their chances for survival. They can easily be spooked into collisions with vehicles and other dangerous situations.

Snowy Owls breed on the Arctic tundra — hence their wintering preference for beaches and airports that suggest these white open spaces — and their population fluctuates cyclically with that of their primary Arctic food source, the lemming. The Snowy Owls seem to irrupt every 4 years, and the last big invasion of Snowy Owls in our area, and points west and south, occurred in the winter of 2013–2014. Their migration is as mysterious as everything else about them, because some Snowy Owls will actually move north in the winter. Since it is primarily juveniles we see moving south, one theory is that the adults stay closer to the breeding grounds. Although lemmings are their preferred food source, Snowy Owls are not picky and will prey on other rodents, birds, and fish.

Males and adults are whiter than females and juveniles, which are identified by their black barring. It may be difficult to distinguish a young male from an older female, but the purest white birds are undoubtedly adult males and the most heavily barred are young females. They will often sit for hours on a dune or the beach, frequently rotating their heads, unfamiliar with and unafraid of their admirers. (And if you see a lone white lump in the distance, do not assume it is a plastic bag!)

In 2013, the Port Authority of New York and New Jersey authorized the extermination of Snowy Owls that congregated at airports and were potentially hazardous to planes, resulting in three owls being killed with a shotgun. This led to a public outcry and a petition with thousands of signatures, especially after it emerged that conservation groups had been working with Boston's Logan Airport for years to capture and relocate, rather than shoot, Snowy Owls. In response, the Port Authority agreed to capture and relocate the owls. Nevertheless, a lawsuit was brought by an animal advocacy organization, Friends of Animals, that sought to alter the policies of the federal agencies that oversee bird removal. The suit charged that it was unnecessary to shoot Snowy Owls because they are easily captured. In 2016, the U.S. Court of Appeals upheld a lower court's ruling that permits could be issued for the Port Authority to shoot any migratory birds that endanger a plane and its passengers. (We can see the results of this ruling in the 70,000+ geese, gulls, and other birds, most of which are not migratory, that have been slaughtered at area airports since Chesley Sullenberger landed his plane on the Hudson River in 2009 — with no proof that the slaughter has made our skies safer.)

Whether changing bad policy or bad birding etiquette, it is up to us to protect the truly otherworldly Snowy Owls in our midst.

JOB OPENING AT HEMPSTEAD PLAINS

In July, SSAS's Betsy Gulotta will be retiring from her position as the long-time, part-time executive director of Friends of Hempstead Plains at Nassau Community College. For job requirements and to apply, send e-mail to info@friendsofhp.org. We're planning another bird walk at Hempstead Plains on the first Sunday in May.

VOLUNTEERS FOR WILDLIFE (516) 674-0982

OLD SKIMMERS AT WWW.SSAUDUBON.ORG

Michael Sperling

SSAS's first Web pages were set up in the 1990s on the National Audubon Society's server by a volunteer from a Westchester chapter. Not long afterwards, Audubon decided that hosting chapters wasn't a good idea and the chapters that had sites were set out on their own. Thanks to a few SSAS volunteers, particularly Tom Torma and then Anne-Marie Conn, we established and maintained our own site from 2000 until last June.

Although Anne-Marie, who stepped into a void in 2003, was quite willing to continue as webmaster (fortunately, she is still administering our Yahoo! Group), the board decided a year ago that it was time to overhaul www.ssaudubon.org, using an Audubon grant and the professional webmaster that other Long Island chapters have been using for years.

We're continuing to expand our Web site and recently achieved one goal by posting PDF files of every SSAS newsletter that we could find [we're missing the very first two (from 1970) and a smattering of others from the 1970s and early 1980s]. So, if you've ever wondered what our newsletter looked like before it had a name and in the days when editors used typewriters, pens, scissors, and glue, check out www.ssaudubon.org. To learn how our all-volunteer chapter was started, read the history article in the December 1994 issue. And if you still have any of the missing issues, please let me scan them.