OUTH HORE KIMMER

VOLUME 48. NUMBER 1 — SOUTH SHORE AUDUBON SOCIETY

SEPTEMBER 2018

NEXT MEETING

Dolores Rogers & Bill Belford

DATE: Tuesday, September 11, 2018

TIME: 7:30 P.M.

PLACE: Freeport Memorial Library

144 W. Merrick Rd. (at S. Ocean Ave.)

SPEAKER: John Brokos

TOPIC: Nature... A Gift from Our Creator

For the first monthly meeting since May, SSAS welcomes back John Brokos for "a great collection of nature images that includes a bit of everything — birds, insects, reptiles and amphibians, flowers, other animals, landscapes, the night sky, etc. These are all award-winning images of high impact." John says that although his presentation's name is unchanged from his last hour-long talk, nearly all of the slides will be unfamiliar.

John is a Diamond Star Exhibitor who in 1984–86 ranked 12th in the nature salons, where he competed internationally with 100,000 exhibitors including some of the best pro shooters. He is a founding member of the Freeport Camera Club, which still meets in the library. He is a member of the Hall of Fame of The Photographic Federation of Long Island and a Fellow of the Photographic Society of America. Some of his photos are on his website, www.imagesfordecor.com. 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 *Exploring the Other Island: a seasonal guide to nature on Long Island* by John Turner.

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.

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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.

BURKE GRANT REPORT

Belty Borowsky

SSAS members and friends have been busy during the newsletter's summer break! As reported in the April *Skimmer*, SSAS was awarded two \$1,000 grants to raise awareness of the advantages of planting native species wherever possible, and to create gardens at two sites in our catchment area: Tackapausha Museum and Preserve, and the Hempstead Plains.

We do tend to plant species that we are familiar with but there are so many benefits of choosing native species! First of all, native species are adapted to local environments, so they tend to do very well with a minimum of active maintenance (extra watering, weeding, etc.). Having grown in our area for thousands of years, they have also developed natural resistance to insect damage. But, in addition, some species have coevolved with native local butterflies and birds, forming close mutually beneficial relationships. The butterflies and birds consume parts of the plants, but in so doing they carry the same species' pollen from one plant to another. So our native milkweeds are essential to monarch butterflies; our Ruby-throated Hummingbird loves jewelweed, and so forth. We also know that the timing and locations of modern bird migrations coincide with where and when specific native plant species flower.

Last, but certainly not least, some of our native plants are spectacularly beautiful: purple coneflowers, red cardinal flowers, goldenrods, blue vervain, milkweed, and the list goes on. When our native species are planted together, they form a most beautiful display and they attract

butterflies and birds to the garden through the warmer weather.

The grant for Tackapausha was a cooperative grant funded through the National Audubon Society, and the grant for the Hempstead Plains was provided by the National Audubon Society's Coleman and Susan Burke Center for Native Plants. The work at Tackapausha is reported on the next page; the work at Hempstead Plains is described below.

The Plants for Birds Burke Grant funded a conference for the public on native plants held at the Hempstead Plains Education and Research Center on April 21, and paid for plants, seed packets containing seeds from native prairie plants, and signage for the new butterfly garden created in front of the center on July 21. The conference was highlighted by a talk on native plants by Jennifer



Cappello-Ruggiero from the Cornell Cooperative Extension of Nassau County, and by a talk on bee biology and diversity by Carl Flatow. Immediately after the conference,

attendees had an opportunity to tour the Plains.

The garden was a wonderful community effort. Most of the weeds were removed from two areas in front of the center within two hours, thanks to the many volunteers who came to help. This included the efforts of Boy Scout Scott Henneberger, who took this on as part of his Eagle Scout project. He recruited friends and family to come and help with the job, and he made the butterfly boxes that were installed that day. Other volunteers were students in a Nassau Community College physical sciences class taught by Professor Elizabeth Farrell, as well as members of SSAS and the board of the Friends of Hempstead Plains. One hundred seed packets were assembled by volunteers from the Nassau BOCES Center for Community Adjustment with seeds that they and other volunteers collected from native prairie grasses and forbs at Hempstead Plains. In addition to the butterfly boxes, many species of plants native to the Plains were planted in the garden. Signs identifying the plants will be installed in the fall.

We were gratified to see butterflies hovering around the newly planted garden even as we were working on it!

So native plants not only benefit the environment by minimizing the need for fertilizers and pesticides, but they also provide specific kinds of foods for local animal species, including birds. A further bonus is that since they do require less chemicals and maintenance, they're also more economical to maintain. It's an amazing win-win situation

If you would like to see which plants are best for your specific home's environment, visit https://www.audubon.org/native-plants for a recommended list.

We wish to thank National Audubon Society for stimulating us to encourage native plantings, and all the volunteers who helped provide the conference and make the new butterfly garden. Special thanks to Betsy Gulotta, who partnered with us from the beginning, expediting all aspects of the conference and the plantings; to Amanda Furcall, the new Director of the Friends of Hempstead Plains, who helped coordinate the work on the garden; and to Marilyn Hametz of SSAS, who wrote the grant application and helped throughout.

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 Memorial Library from 7:30-9:30 P.M., usually on the second Tuesday of the month (third Tuesday this February), 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. 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:

our new members since the last skimmer are.
Baldwin John Kenny
Bethpage Anna Hughes, Magnolia Syed
East Meadow Susan Bernstein, S. Millman
Franklin Square Henry A. Clasen
Freeport Catherine Collins, Cynthia Gillen
Garden City Gerald Goldberg, Joan Haskins Ripp
Hicksville Eleanor Crosio, Elaine Peters, Doris Reilly
Hollis Davera Banks
Island Park Kelley Berotti
Levittown Pat Burns, Tami Cooley, Joseph Pando
Long Beach Elsa Farbiarz, Brandie Johnson, Michele Knox, Ken
Petriz, Barbara Vitale
Massapequa Lois Garrett, Janet Schnars, Vincent Sorrentino
Massapequa Park Joseph F. Agovino, Theresa Bartlotti, Edith M.
Corso, James Ferris
Oceanside Mary Alfaro
Plainview Bert Moskowitz, Zita Rosen
Rockville Centre Ann Cantor
Roosevelt Harry D. Vanager
Seaford Theresa Barrett
Uniondale David Brown, Bertha Stringfellow
Valley Stream Mineo Yasufuku
Wantagh Dorothy Earle, Charles Zegers

HIGH SCHOOL SCHOLARSHIP WINNERS

The recipients of our annual graduation ceremony scholarships, arranged by Joe Landesberg, were James Hastings from Freeport H.S., Emily Lennon from Baldwin H.S., Jenna Lopez from South Side H.S. in Rockville Centre, and Ethan Maitra from East Meadow H.S. We congratulate all four and wish them success.

OUR NATIVE PLANTINGS AT TACKAPAUSHA

Marilyn Hamelz

Our summer has been active, and the Tackapausha Museum's garden shows it. With a National Audubon Collaborative Funding Grant, South Shore Audubon has added native plants and improved and beautified the garden in Seaford for birds, butterflies, and people.

Anne Mehlinger has put in an enormous amount of effort leading the project with the planning, purchase of plants, donation of plants from her wonderful garden, preparation of the site, and planting. SSAS volunteers who have helped are Betty Belford, Betty Borowsky, Bill Belford, Bill Clifford, Chris Braut, Guy Jacob, Joanne Del Prete, and me.

Even the weather cooperated on our first two weeding, planting, and mulching sessions on the mornings of July 3 and 17. After the working mornings we relaxed, snacked, and socialized.



Tackapausha staff and volunteers water during dry spells and help with maintenance.

Among the native plants added are lowbush blueberry, switchgrass (pictured), New York ironweed, aster, goldenrod, sunflowers, cardinal flower, and honeysuckle.

When completed, the SSAS Tackapausha project will include additional plants, ground signs identifying the plants, and informational materials. If you would like to help, please contact me at mwhametz@optonline.net.

OFFSHORE WIND MEETINGS IN SEPTEMBER

The NYS Energy Research & Development Authority (NYSERDA) has scheduled offshore wind public information meetings to provide updates on NY's plans, including a presentation and O&A.

The first meeting is at Long Beach City Hall from 6:30 P.M. to 8 P.M. on **September 26**. The second is at the Peninsula branch of the Queens Library in Rockaway Beach from 7:30 P.M. to 9 P.M. the next day. There will also be a public webinar from 1 to 2 P.M. on September 19; registration is required and will be capped at 500 attendees.



MONARCH ON THE MILKWEED

Anne Mehlinger

Our most recent SSAS weeding session at Tackapausha, on July 31, was especially memorable because Betty Borowsky and I saw the first monarch butterfly on the common milkweed.

There is a nice stand of common milkweed (Asclepias syriaca) in the front of the Tackapausha Museum's garden. Milkweed is the only plant the monarch will lay its eggs on because its larva can only eat milkweed leaves. Common milkweed is one of its preferred, native species.

We saw a female monarch and she appeared to be laying eggs. Males have a black spot on the webbing of each hind wing; females do not. There was no spot on this monarch's visible hind wing in my photo enlargement.

We will be on the lookout for eggs and larva at our next weeding session. We hope you will join us. Come for an hour or for the whole morning but do come and help if you can. For future weeding dates and any questions, contact me at amehlinger36@gmail.com.

SSAS THANKS ITS ANNUAL DINNER RAFFLE DONORS

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32ND ANNUAL NEW YORK STATE BEACH CLEANUP

See www.nysbeachcleanup.org for a list of cleanups scheduled for **Saturday, September 15** at Lido Beach, Jones Beach, and throughout NY.

HEMPSTEAD LAKE STATE PARK: DEPARTMENT OF ENVIRONMENTAL CONSERVATION DOCUMENTS AND INTERVENTION

Brien Weiner

In the 2017 October and December Skimmers, we described our objections to proposed "improvements" at Hempstead Lake State Park (HLSP) including the loss of wetlands, the removal of trees, and the creation of new trails. The project continues to be a volatile issue. For those readers new to the issue, the HLSP project is part of the Living with the Bay (LWTB) project, the original purpose of which was to mitigate flooding along the Mill River from HLSP to Bay Park. LWTB is overseen by the Governor's Office of Storm Recovery (GOSR) and funded by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development with a grant of \$125 million for Sandy recovery. GOSR has allocated \$34.5 million of that grant to the New York State Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation (OPRHP) for HLSP, much of which is designated for increasing recreational use rather than flood mitigation.

SSAS filed Freedom of Information Law requests to the NYS Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC) in December 2017 and May 2018 for documents related to the HLSP project. We were sent a CD of documents and visited the DEC office in Stony Brook to photocopy additional documents. From e-mail correspondence between GOSR and the DEC in August 2017, we learned that GOSR admitted to "segmentation" of the HLSP project from the restoration of the Mill River, while lumping

the remaining projects in a "Frankenstein" report. Segmentation is prohibited by the State Environmental Quality Review Act (SEQRA) because of the need to assess cumulative impacts. We also learned that GOSR was in a

rush for a negative declaration of environmental impact on HLSP, but the DEC said there was insufficient mitigation, especially for the wetlands.

We believe that the comments provided by SSAS contributed to the precautions being taken by the DEC, especially since the DEC files included a copy of the SSAS letter that detailed the ways in which the HLSP project met the requirements for significant environmental impact according to SEQRA, and the environmental issues that needed to be addressed. Four other Long Island Audubon chapters and NYC Audubon signed onto our letter.

Nevertheless, there was other disturbing information in the documents:

In GOSR's Tree Removal Application, 1050 trees will be removed for the Hempstead Lake and South Pond dams; this is less than the original 1200, but still a substantial number (an additional 1800 trees are designated for removal from the North Ponds area and 100 trees for a "greenway" through the park). There are references to an emergency action plan if the dam starts to fail, and to an arborist to prevent damage to the trees during

construction, but during a tour given by OPRHP on May 12 we were told neither of the measures were in place.

The application states that tree removal will take place from 11/1 to 3/31 to avoid impacts on bats and migratory birds, but HLSP is a hot spot for migratory birds in March, as well as nesting grounds for our Great Horned Owls. Further, stump removal will take place year-round, which will disrupt nesting birds and ground foragers. The DEC comments that an absence of data does not mean that rare or state-listed (as endangered or threatened) bat species do not occur; the DEC recommends leaving all snag and cavity tress, and cautions that there may be other species and habitats requiring surveys and permits.

In a North Ponds report, the DEC recommends reducing the dredging of the Northwest Pond to minimize the loss of wet meadow, and mitigating the loss of red maple swamp for the sediment basin in the Northeast Pond. A February 2018 Louis Berger corporation report discusses reusing the dredged material from the North Ponds for the berms. A letter dated March 1, 2018 from the DEC says much of the dredged material will be too contaminated for reuse. DEC meeting notes from March 20, 2018 discuss reusing the dredged material and capping the contaminated parts (adding \$7 million to the cost of about \$9 million). We need clarification regarding disposal or capping of contaminated sediments, and if capping is not financially feasible, we need to know if the alternative is sufficient to prevent further contamination.

The contractor Cashin Associates requested an exemption from cleaning up dioxin because of cost; the DEC thankfully denied the request. All the sediment testing required by the DEC is expensive and we need to know whether GOSR properly allocated the money. The Louis Berger report presents scores for wetlands improvement but does not explain the criteria for its scores.

The plans for the ponds have changed substantially several times. The plans call for constructing concrete sediment basins and bermed edges along wetlands, which goes against recent trends and the goal to restore the Mill River with green infrastructure. Moreover, the plans describe how large volumes of water (and the floatables with them) will flow over the floatables catcher. The plans recognize the need to catch floatables at their source but maintain that it is outside OPRHP's jurisdiction.

The plans state that the most feasible cleanup will involve capture and removal of all larger floatables and bulk materials along the shores and in low-lying forested areas along the ponds, based on economic restrictions. However, the plans also acknowledge that excavating soils in and around the ponds in order to capture microdebris and buried debris, or additional efforts to remove submerged debris and debris throughout the woodlands, would increase environmental benefit. We need to know the cost of a more-thorough cleanup. Removing contaminants should take priority over other HLSP goals like kayak launches and a new education center when an older

building can be repurposed. Further, the floatables collected cannot be recycled unless they are relatively free of dirt, soil, and exterior wastes. There would be additional cost to sort materials by type and cleanliness, but added environmental benefit. Cleanup will have to be by hand because of the limited access for heavy equipment and the sensitivity of the environment, which raises the question: How does GOSR propose to do the dredging and berming?

A U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service report identifies 26 species of migratory birds listed as Birds of Conservation Concern. It notes that Bald Eagles have been observed in the trees surrounding the North Ponds. The report is based on data from 2008 and 2011; there are probably more Birds of Conservation Concern using HLSP now due to land development and declining bird populations.

The plans describe how trees on the dams will be removed, leaving the roots to decompose and potentially compromising the integrity of the dam. We need to emphasize that prior to any modification of the dams, current seepage rates need to be determined; if modifications are to be made, they should be incremental so the effect on seepage can be determined.

Given the information from the DEC, SSAS urges our members to contact our local officials to protect the environment of HLSP, and consequently the health of the Mill River and the safety of its residents downstream, and to ensure that funds intended for Sandy recovery and flood mitigation are properly allocated. An open house on the HLSP Project, the plans for which were supposed to be 90% complete, was postponed until at least September because the plans were not ready. The Citizen's Advisory Committee for LWTB attributes the slowdown to the need to address the environmental concerns voiced by SSAS. Please continue to attend GOSR's meetings and events regarding HLSP, and make your voices heard.

************************************** 🖋 BIRD WALKS 🥪

Joe Landesberg

All walks start at 9 A.M.; no walk if it rains. 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 ssaudubon.org.

Aug. 26	Mill Pond Park (Wantagh/Bellmore, north side of Merrick Rd.)
Sept. 2	Jamaica Bay Wildlife Refuge
Sept. 9	Hempstead Lake State Park (Southern State Parkway Exit 18 south, Field #3)
Sept. 16	Massapequa Preserve (LIRR N.E. lot)
Sept. 23	Jones Beach West End #2, N.E. corner
Sept. 30	Hempstead Lake State Park (see above)
Oct. 7	Norman J. Levy Park and Preserve

COLLEGE SCHOLARSHIP WINNERS

Belsy Gulotta

The winners of our annual Jerry Bishop Environmental Scholarship, who received their awards at our annual dinner in June, were ReginaLena McManus from Rockaway Park and Alison Schroder from Garden City.

ReginaLena is going into her senior year at Adelphi University with a 3.94 grade point average. She is majoring in biology and anthropology and wants to pursue a Ph.D. program in marine and atmospheric science, having lost part of her home during Hurricane Sandy. Her career goals include doing research or working for a federal agency such as NOAA, the EPA, or the National Park Service, combining education and environmental awareness. Her scholarship will go towards her research.

Alison is going into her junior year at Adelphi and is majoring in environmental studies with a minor in biology or chemistry. She has volunteered at the Garden City Bird Sanctuary and did field work in Australia, studying coral bleaching. She wants to study abroad in Costa Rica, concentrating on sustainability. Her scholarship will go towards her travel expenses and research.

Both recipients showed a high degree of academic maturity, ambition, and dedication to working on environmental issues. We wish them luck in their academic careers. SSAS thanks Evelyn Bishop for her continuing

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BOOKS FOR BIRDERS

R. U. Abyrdar II with Sy Schiff

Our first book of the season will answer many of your birding questions. Questions are a way of focusing our interest, but finding answers can sometimes be frustrating. Many of us have often hoped to find an easy reference source that would provide all the answers in one place! This month's book, *Do Birds Have Knees* by Stephen Moss, could be the answer(s). I hope you enjoy it! (Sy's contribution begins now!)

A silly title for a book full of knowledge on birds (you don't get to the title question till the end!). The format of this book is different from the usual. Instead of what might be expected from an exposition on avian biology, a series of questions, followed by several explanatory paragraphs, covers each item. This is an avian biology book hiding in a format disguised as a bunch of children's questions!

The questions are simple and the answers use simple language, but slowly but surely they cover the larger subject in a fairly comprehensive manner. The author is a well-known British naturalist and the book has a British publisher. However, the many examples cover both sides of the pond plus other worldwide areas. To be expected, the examples do have a British bias. The examples and photos cover the information. Almost everything is pertinent and the species' names become irrelevant.

The book is organized into chapters. Instead of covering each topic, there is a series of questions. The questions are arranged in a logical order and cover each topic via the answers. It's just different. Chapters cover "What is a bird?," "Where do birds come from?," "How many birds are there?," "Where do birds live?," "How do birds move?," and so on. So, instead of an exposition in each chapter, one gets the information broken up by a series of questions rather than in a smooth textbook manner. Because there is no formal presentation, it's very easy to skip around and catch pieces at your leisure and then come back as you continue through the book.

Definitions are answers to questions. What is phishing, jiss, listing, twitching, dipping? If you want to know something, the answer lies somewhere within. The index is a normal one and you can find what you are looking for. But, you just don't have a lookup table for the questions. The book concludes with a chapter on "Birds and People." As it says on the cover... "ALL YOUR BIRD QUESTIONS ANSWERED" — including (R.U.'s concluding comment) some you never thought of! So, read it and ENJOY!!

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

MY YARD

Franklin Rothenberg

Supposedly, after three years without pesticides, fungicides, herbicides, or acidulated fertilizer, soil will qualify as "organic." I'm not sure what acidulated fertilizer is, but anecdotal reference tells me it's wholly or partly petrochemical, as are the previously mentioned lawn additives. The fringe hysteria (it's not mainstream) claims that from a barrel of crude oil, only 50% can be utilized as gasoline or other fuels; the other 50% has to be utilized in some manner, or untenable amounts of petrochemical waste product would have to be stored or simply poured down the drain. This is one of the more lasting detrimental side effects of the industrial revolution.

President Jimmy Carter launched a dialogue equating the energy crisis with the "moral equivalent of war." Since then, limited and mainly token gestures have quelled the dialogue, engineered, I suspect, by big oil. The insipidly slow transition from fossil fuels has unacceptably accelerated global warming and pollution in an increasingly overpopulated environment. [Editor's interruption: See Wikipedia's entry for "Moral Equivalent of War speech," which attempted to set goals for us to achieve by 1985.]

Anyway, I've given up the "perfect" lawn in favor of lots of weeds. These include pretty violets which bloom in the spring and have taken over swaths of lawn space. I allow other edibles, such as dandelion, clover, lamb's quarter (pigweed), and my favorite, ribwort plantain, which is both edible and relieves itching when rubbed on insect bites. I once mowed a yellow jacket, which flew up

and stung me on my neck. I reached down and grabbed some ribwort plantain, crushed it, and applied it. The pain was immediately

remedied. I still felt something, but the pain was gone.

Wood sorrel has appeared and may be ingested in small quantities, but only as an occasional garnish, as the oxalic acid can affect the kidneys. A sprig once in a while is very tasty.

Jewelweed supposedly acts as a prophylactic if applied before exposure to poison ivy and will keep the rash from occurring.

I like garlic mustard, although it's not indigenous, having been brought over from Europe as a garden herb. I keep it in check by pulling it out before it reseeds and allow it only on the edges.

I never water my lawn, which saves water and money, and keeps the soil sweet by avoiding chlorine.

If television advertising hadn't caused the "perfect" lawn mania, we would all have benefitted, except for the corporate interests. During the Great Depression, people supplemented their diets with dandelion and other edible weeds. Sadly, that is not even an option today.

SHETLAND'S FAIR ISLE - ITS KNITTING AND ITS **BIRDS**

Jim Brown

This past May, I and my wife Gail traveled to Scotland. Aside from time spent hiking in Orkney and Shetland, and visiting Glasgow and areas around the city, we made sure to visit Fair Isle. Gail is an avid knitter and we both love bird-watching, so spending several days on Fair Isle became a major goal of our trip.

Fair Isle, officially a part of Shetland, is a small island, 3.0 miles long and 1.5 miles wide, located in the North Sea halfway between the Scottish archipelagos of Shetland and Orkney, groups of islands off the northern coast of Scotland. Fair Isle is considered the most remote inhabited island in the United Kingdom, currently with a population of about fifty people. It is somewhat difficult to get to, most people taking a 25 minute plane ride from Shetland or booking a 2+ hour trip on the mail and supply boat, the Good Shepherd. If the weather is not good, the plane will not fly and the boat will not sail. These transportation uncertainties add to the remoteness of the island and also to its allure. As it turned out, we were lucky in this regard — we had two smooth and beautiful trips out and back in our small Inter Island Air Service plane, enjoying the views while flying relatively low above steep island cliffs and the sea.

Fair Isle is famous for its knitting. "Fair Isle Knitting" is a technique with a long history and is Gail's favorite way of knitting. It has been variously defined, but seems at least to involve the use of several colors of wool knitted alternately to form a design. It is said that some of the island's knitting motifs resulted from Spaniards shipwrecked on Fair Isle centuries ago. Most of the inhabitants of the island live in the southern half, on small farms called "crofts," and some of them still knit. Currently the residents hand knit for themselves and for friends and family. The principal commercial knitting is also still painstakingly done by hand, but using old-fashioned knitting machines. Numerous wooly sheep and lambs can be seen on Fair Isle, but they are not as numerous as the birds!

The Fair Isle Bird Observatory (FIBO) has been studying bird migration and seabirds since 1948. We stayed at the Observatory's Guesthouse (built in 2010) for four days and three nights, participating in their educational programs and using the Observatory as a base for exploring the island and observing the birdlife. Particularly interesting was going out in the early morning on the staff's trap rounds, where birds are caught in Heligoland traps, then taken back to the Observatory (in small breathable pouches), where the birds are measured, weighed, and ringed (aka "banded"). One of the birds caught during our stay was a lovely Bluethroat, a strikingly colored migratory passerine we had never seen before.

FIBO is known as one of the best places in the United Kingdom to see migrants and rare vagrants, birds often

blown off course. While we were at the Observatory one of these extreme rarities made an appearance — a Song Sparrow was sighted just as we were arriving! This species from North America, so very common on our side of the Atlantic, had not been seen in the UK since 1994, and here it was on tiny Fair Isle! On our plane to the island, one of the passengers, a Shetlander, booked the flight just to see the bird. He was to prove just the first of many. A number of chartered planes brought groups of avid UK birders to the island. (One small plane even suffered a minor crash, damaging its landing gear — the broken plane was still there by the side of the runway when we left the island.) Others booked passage on the Good Shepherd just to catch a glimpse of the rare bird. Gail and I also caught a good view — the bird was feeding in the garden outside the Observatory.

We were in Fair Isle during the migration season. We were in fact lucky to get a booking at the Observatory because of the keen interest in the number of migrants and rare birds that arrive on this small, isolated island. Fair Isle is also home to numerous species and large concentrations of seabirds. Seabird species — Arctic Skuas, Great Skuas, Atlantic Puffins, Northern Gannets (pictured),

> Kittiwakes, and others — are counted and studied extensively by FIBO, especially during the late spring and summer. Puffins were a delight

to watch - groups of them were located within a short walk from our guest room. Great Skuas, huge brown birds (locally called bonxies), were omnipresent and could be quite intimidating if you approached too closely to their territories. We were told by the Observatory staff that the populations of these various seabird species were in trouble. The cause for much of the decline was overfishing, creating a loss of prey for these magnificent birds. We were told that, in general, only Northern Gannets seem to be holding their own, as they are able to fly great distances for food and can capture prey fish inhabiting deeper, less-fished ocean levels.

Gail and I highly recommend a trip to Fair Isle — especially for knitters and birders! For further information on both Fair Isle and its Bird Observatory, check out FIBO's website: http://www.fairislebirdobs.co.uk/index.html.

^

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Frank Scoblete, Director (6/21) 596-3239
Betty Belford, Director (6/20)
Paul Stessel, Director (6/20)
Bill Belford, Director (6/19)
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