SOUTH SHORE SKIMMER

VOLUME 47, NUMBER 4 — SOUTH SHORE AUDUBON SOCIETY DEC. 2018 & JAN. 2019

NEXT MEETING

Dolores Rogers & Bill Belford

DATE: Tuesday, December 11, 2018
TIME: 7:30 P.M.
PLACE: Freeport Memorial Library
144 W. Merrick Rd. (at S. Ocean Ave.)
SPEAKER: Stella Miller
TOPIC: Why Birds Matter, the Threats They Face, How We Can Help

More than ever, people are beginning to appreciate birds. Yes, they are gorgeous, but we are also impressed and humbled by their athleticism and awe-inspiring feats. Unfortunately, birds are in trouble. According to the 2016 "State of the Birds Report," one third of all of North America's birds are in need of conservation action due to a myriad of factors. The gravest threats are habitat loss, window collisions, climate change, cat predation, accidental bycatch, overfishing of forage fish stocks, and pollution. But why should we even care? And what can we do to help? This program will explain why birds matter, the perils they face, and how we can, as individuals and communities, work together to help protect them.

Stella Miller, Conservation, Education, and Outreach Manager at Wild Birds Unlimited, and a lifelong conservationist, is the former president of Huntington–Oyster Bay Audubon, a position she held for over ten years. Since 2006, Stella has spearheaded conservation advocacy efforts such as a national "Save Our Raptors" campaign, "Long Island to Guatemala: The Avian Connection" partnership, the Long Island "Keep Your Cats Indoors" educational campaign, and a Bird Friendly Communities Initiative which included designing a native demonstration garden at Sagamore Hill National Historic Site. She is also the cofounder of the Preserve Plum Island Coalition.

At Wild Birds Unlimited, she continues to advocate for birds, and spread the message of the critical need to not only protect, but to create, habitat for wildlife.

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 *1001 Secrets Every Birder Should Know: Tips and Trivia for the Backyard and Beyond* by Sharon "Birdchick" Stiteler.

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!

NEXT MEETING AFTER NEXT MEETING

DATE: Tuesday, January 8, 2019
TIME: 7:30 P.M.
PLACE: Freeport Memorial Library
TOPIC: Annual Members' Night

Members' night is a chance for you to shine! We have many hobbies and interests that are not focused on birding — cooking, knitting, gardening, quilting, playing an instrument, writing, photography, etc. Whether or not you bring something to share with your fellow members, join us and learn about what some of the people who share your interest in birds and the environment like to do.

Pre-Meeting Book Discussion. For our January meeting, arrive a half-hour early to discuss one of the two books that are reviewed in this *Skimmer,* Jennifer Ackerman's *The Genius of Birds* (one of the 20 books bought by the library with last year's SSAS donation).

HEMPSTEAD LAKE STATE PARK: PUBLIC HEARINGS

Brien Weiner

Despite minimal efforts by the Governor's Office of Storm Recovery (GOSR) to give notice of public hearings on their Hempstead Lake State Park (HLSP) project, the Citizens Advisory Committee (CAC) and South

Shore Audubon (with special thanks to Marilyn Hametz and Joanne Del Prete) managed to get the word out for a small but passionate turnout of residents and environmentalists (from SSAS, Nassau County Hiking and Outdoors Club, Sierra Club, and Citizens Campaign for the Environment) who spoke out against the removal of 2550 trees and the destruction of woodlands and wetlands. The hearings were held on October 17 at the Rockville Centre and Lynbrook libraries, and were covered by *Newsday* (www.newsday.com/long-island/nassau/hempstead-lake-state-park-trees-1.22023561), News 12 (http://longisland.news12.com/story/39308434/state-plan-to-fix-aging-dams-would-require-removal-of-2500-trees), and the LI Herald (www.liherald.com/westhempstead/stories/project-to-remove-trees-at-hempstead-lake-state-park-raise-concerns,108337). The coverage includes interviews and quotes from Jim Brown, Guy Jacob, and Betty Belford, and quotes from public comments submitted by SSAS that appeared in the November *Skimmer*.

The reasons we love and need trees are many: to provide habitat for birds and wildlife, to capture carbon and clean the air, to soothe the soul by sheer beauty. The most controversial reason for the removal of trees at HLSP concerns the integrity of the dams. GOSR claims they must comply with NYS Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC) regulations to keep earthen dams clear of trees; however, an Army Corps of Engineers report specifically on the HLSP dam, which is Long Island's only Class C High Hazard dam because of the number of residents downstream, recommends retaining the trees. According to David Stern, cochair of the CAC and a professor at Nassau Community College with a Ph.D. in water resources engineering, the DEC regulations apply to well-maintained dams, which the HLSP dam is not. Removing the trees and leaving the roots to decompose could destabilize the dam and lead to catastrophic flooding downriver. The dam currently shows no signs of leakage. If trees are to be removed, it should be done with a pilot cut of a small area to test for seepage.

The dam issue highlights the need for further study and the full Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) that many hearing attendees demanded. State Senator Todd Kaminsky was quoted in the *Herald* one week taking credit for moving GOSR along on the HLSP project and another week expressing concern about the removal of trees. We hope he comes down on the cautious side of the issue and joins the many voices calling for a full EIS.

Other deficiencies in the HLSP Environmental Assessment (EA) that were brought to light by the CAC include a Hydrological and Hydraulic Assessment based on limited data from a downstream tributary (Pines Brook), last collected in 1999, and not on current conditions at HLSP. Probable Maximum Precipitation predictions are based on a 1982 document that predates the effects of climate change. Further, the HLSP dam can hold back storm flow for only 39% of Probable Maximum Flow (PMF) before overtopping, while the DEC requires that Class C dams meet 50% of PMF; the EA should include an alternative with an emergency spillway to meet this standard.

Regarding the North Ponds, the proposed constructed wetlands of the stormwater catchment facility will have high-slope berms and provide questionable suitable habitat for the abundance and diversity of birds that currently use the ponds. Water quality testing for the North Ponds indicates that the existing ponds currently provide significant water quality improvements; the EA does not consider whether disturbing this area will significantly reduce the water treatment ability of the existing ponds.

These deficiencies of the EA can be added to the many that have appeared in these pages over the last two years. Nevertheless, even waist deep in the big muddy, the GOSR fools say to push on. According to the notice of the finding of no significant impact, "Subject to public comments, no further review of the Proposed Project is anticipated" and "if modifications result from public comment, these will be made prior to proceeding with the expenditure of funds." Bids for tree removal were taken the same day as the public hearings, and GOSR's most recent newsletter stated that tree removal for the dams will begin in January 2019. Tree removal can run through March 31, interfering with migratory birds and nesting Great Horned Owls.

In light of the public comments and outcry, we hope that GOSR will prepare an EIS, reconsider the destruction of trees and wetlands, and reallocate funds being used for purposes other than flood mitigation for Sandy victims, as originally intended. We thank all those who attended hearings, submitted comments, signed the online petition, and called local officials. We will continue to make our voices heard. At 7 P.M. on **December 12**, GOSR will have an open house CAC meeting in the East Rockaway H.S. gym; we will let you know if HLSP is on the agenda.

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SSAS is now registered with AmazonSmile, where Amazon donates 0.5% of the price of eligible purchases to charities selected by customers. Prices are the same as at the main Amazon site, so please support us via **https://smile.amazon.com/ch/23-7300504**.

DISCOUNTED AUDUBON CALENDARS FOR SALE

At our walks and meetings we're selling Audubon calendars at a bargain price of $11 apiece.

The 12-inch by 28-inch (when opened) "Songbirds & Other Backyard Birds" Picture-a-Day Wall Calendar (list price $15.99) features a photograph and related text at the top, plus smaller images throughout the unusually tall grid. Samples of its 28 pages are at https://www.pageaday.com/brands/audubon.

This year we're also offering the Audubon Nature calendar (list price $14.99), which "spotlights stunning landscapes from around the world."

BIRD WALKS

Joe Landesberg

All walks start at **9 A.M.**; no walk if it rains or snows or temperature is below 25°F. Except where noted below, 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.

Nov. 25	Point Lookout Town Park, S.E. corner (and Lido Preserve afterwards)
Dec. 2	Alley Pond Park (76th Ave. parking lot)
Dec. 9	Hempstead Lake State Park (Southern State Parkway Exit 18 south, Field #3)
Dec. 16	Jones Beach West End #2, N.E. corner
Dec. 23 & 30	*Happy Holidays! — No Walks*
Jan. 6	Mill Pond Park (Wantagh/Bellmore, north side of Merrick Rd.)
Jan. 13	Jones Beach West End #2, N.E. corner (led by two Bills, phone nos. on back page)
Jan. 20	Pelham Bay Park* (led by Steve Schellenger, 987-8103)
Jan. 27	Hempstead Lake State Park (see above; led by two Bills, phone nos. on back page)
Feb. 3	Point Lookout Town Park, S.E. corner (and Lido Preserve afterwards)

*For Pelham Bay Park (where we hope to see owls): Wear hiking shoes — it's a hilly forest walk to the bay. Take Throgs Neck Bridge to I-695 north to I-95 north. Take I-95 to exit #9, Hutchinson River Parkway north. Take first exit #5, Orchard Beach Rd., go past traffic circle, and continue on Orchard Beach Rd. to end. Turn left on Park Dr. Go past another traffic circle and enter parking lot through toll gates (free); meet at far left corner of parking lot (northeast corner). See www.mappery.com/Pelham-Bay-Park-NYC-Map or Google's map of "Orchard Beach Parking Lot" for reference.

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BIRDERS RESCUE CATERPILLARS AT MASSAPEQUA PRESERVE

Anne Mehlinger

On Sunday, September 16, SSAS's birders were heading back to our cars after a quiet morning in the woods. A storm was coming and there were few birds in the trees; perhaps that was why someone noticed three tiny caterpillars crossing the bike path. They were about an inch long, with lengthwise black & white stripes on their backs, orange stripes on their sides, and black & white dots at either end of their bodies. That camouflage might confuse predators, who would be unsure which end was the head, but it was not effective against bikers. One caterpillar was mortally wounded, half flattened on the blacktop by a passing biker.

Of course we had to rescue the others, and after a few photos we carefully moved them to the woods. What kind of caterpillar were they?

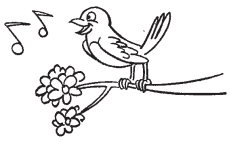
Later that day, Chris Braut e-mailed me his photos and the ID of the caterpillars, which he found on Discover Life, an app on his phone. It was named a turbulent phosphila or two-headed caterpillar (Phosphila turbulenta). The TP caterpillar becomes a small, brown TP moth.

On the 24th, SSAS photographer Bill Belford discovered another turbulent phosphila caterpillar while birding at Hempstead Lake State Park.

Contemporary Hearing Aids

As a member of the Audubon Society, we know how important it is to hear the high frequency chirps and other sounds of the birds.

Sometimes a hearing loss in the same frequencies as the birds' sounds can prevent you from hearing the sounds you enjoy.



Call us to schedule a hearing test and experience all that you might be missing with our exclusive "Try before you buy."

Please call (516) 200-1582

"Let the sounds of the beautiful birds be the music to your ears"

Mention this ad and receive 10% off the purchase of a pair of premium hearing aids.

hearbetterny.com *New Hyde Park*

CLIMATE NEWS UPDATE

Jim Brown

There have been several recent climate-related events that I believe demand the attention of South Shore Audubon members and others working to save the planet from the ravages of human-induced climate change. In this regard, I wish to discuss the release of two important scientific studies and two political events.

In early October, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), the United Nations body responsible for assessing the science relating to climate change, issued a report stating that the planet will likely have warmed 1.5°C (2.7°F) by 2030 unless extreme measures to lower carbon dioxide (CO_2) emissions are rapidly taken. Keeping global warming at 1.5°C will be extremely difficult, requiring major changes in energy generation and use, transportation, and building construction. The report highlights that the goal can technically be reached but would require unprecedented, concerted social and political action to fight climate change. Currently, emissions are not declining at all — in 2017 emissions increased 1.5% and they are likely to increase again this year. Our window to limit global warming to the 1.5 degrees goal is rapidly closing — catastrophe awaits.

In late October, a recent study reported, in the journal *Nature*, that our oceans are warming more quickly than was thought to be the case, even by the IPCC. This rapid warming threatens more coastal flooding, stronger hurricanes, the death of coral reefs, and food shortages. The study, led by Laure Resplandy, a Princeton University oceanographer, demonstrates that from 1991 to 2016 the temperature of the world's oceans has increased more than 60% over the official estimate given by the IPCC. The IPCC, if this new ocean study is accurate, may indeed be underestimating the rapidity at which we are all approaching the precipice of total climate chaos.

On October 28, Jair Bolsonaro was elected president of Brazil. A right-wing politician, he has championed a return to the law-and-order days of the country's period of military rule. Bolsonaro has also campaigned to open the Amazon to further privatization and development. Roads are to be built and trees cleared in the pursuit of profit. Preserving the Amazon rainforest is critical to fighting climate change, as the IPCC and others have consistently affirmed. The Amazon rainforest has been exploited for years and it is likely that the rate of exploitation will increase under Brazil's new president. To combat climate change, reforestation, not deforestation, is needed.

Closer to home, but in the same climate change-threatened world, the Trump administration has made it easier for fossil fuel companies to lease federal lands for fracking. Most of this land is in the West, such as Wyoming, where the number of drilling rigs has doubled since 2016. The process for leasing this land has been speeded up and the time given to the public to dispute the leases has been shortened. Almost 13 million acres of federal land has been offered for lease in the past fiscal year. Attempts are also being made by fossil fuel corporations and the Trump administration to open up critical habitat, e.g., for the sage-grouse, for fossil fuel extraction.

The IPCC and others have said that greenhouse gas emissions can, in fact, and as science affirms, be lowered quickly enough to avoid the major, catastrophic impacts of climate change. There is human-induced warming already, about 1°C, since the beginning of the Industrial Revolution. Limiting the warming to 1.5°C by 2030 is possible according to the IPCC. What is needed most to accomplish this are far-reaching changes in politics and social engagement. Unfortunately, as the two political examples I have given demonstrate, governments sometimes, perhaps all too often, seem to be moving in the opposite direction of what is critically and rapidly required of them and us!

CLIMATE WATCH: NUTHATCHES AND BLUEBIRDS

SSAS's Bill Belford has volunteered to be an Audubon Climate Watch Coordinator and seeks participants for the next season (our chapter's first, with Point Lookout and Jones Beach to be surveyed). The purpose is to document how birds are already responding to a changing climate. Climate Watch takes place during two seasons each year, in the winter, from **January 15** to **February 15**, and in the summer, from May 15 to June 15. Participants can conduct surveys on one or more days of each count period. Repeat surveys of the same points, season to season, are particularly valuable in showing change in occupancy of our target species.

Climate Watch focuses on bluebirds and nuthatches — Eastern Bluebird, Mountain Bluebird, Western Bluebird, White-breasted Nuthatch (pictured), Red-breasted Nuthatch, Brown-headed Nuthatch, and Pygmy Nuthatch. Bluebirds and nuthatches are easy to identify, have an enthusiastic constituency, and Audubon's climate models for these species offer strong predictions for range shifts for us to test.

Audubon provides volunteers with maps of each location, overlaid with a grid of 10 km × 10 km squares showing species-specific predictions for each square based on the climate models. Using the maps provided, volunteers survey appropriate habitat within a square and conduct 12 point counts of five minutes each, then record the number and species of all birds seen or heard within 100 meters.

For further information, see www.audubon.org/news/how-join-climate-watch-community-science-program-audubon or call Bill at 385-1759.

COFFEE LOVERS REJOICE

Guy Jacob

Drink lots of coffee, and save the environment. The more you drink it, the better off the planet will be. If you're waiting for the caveat, here it is: Not just any coffee will do. In fact, most coffee production is harmful because intact forests are stripped away to create large coffee plantations. Numerous species of birds and other wildlife lose their habitat, and the forest is no longer there to sequester carbon dioxide. More than half of 42 migratory songbird species found wintering on sun-grown coffee farms have seriously declining populations. Many of these large plantations profit from Americans' love affair with cheap coffee. Think about all the major brands you see in the supermarkets.

Instead, purchase shade-grown coffee, which is how coffee is naturally grown as an understory plant. The forest remains intact and wildlife thrives. It will cost you more, about $11 a pound, but the birds and those species they cohabitate with are worth it. Cheap food is often much less healthy for your family and our natural world, and coffee is no exception. Saving money today by purchasing cheap food only delays the costs and the suffering that comes with it later on. Be a conscientious consumer today, and make a difference for yourself and the environment.

But beware: Not all organic coffee is shade grown, and not all coffee that is labeled as shade grown truly is. Look for the "Bird Friendly" seal of approval on the coffee package label. These companies are well vetted by the Smithsonian Migratory Bird Center, an agency that is dedicated to understanding, conserving, and championing the grand phenomenon of bird migration. This certification ensures that tropical agricultural forests are preserved when coffee is grown.

If you peruse https://nationalzoo.si.edu/migratory-birds/about-bird-friendly-coffee, you will find that there are a number of online companies from whom you can purchase a variety of Bird Friendly coffees, among the other coffees that they sell. However, only one of the businesses listed sells only coffee that is certified Bird Friendly: https://birdsandbeanscoffee.com.

From your editor: The first page of every *Skimmer* since 2002 has encouraged the use of shade-grown coffee; we serve locally bought shade-grown, organic, and fair-trade decaf at our meetings.

Guy's article led me to visit Audubon's coffee pages (see www.audubon.org/news/how-choose-bird-friendly-coffee, which acknowledges that the Smithsonian's certification is stricter than that of the Rainforest Alliance but provides links for both; Audubon's name is on the Alliance-certified products at www.audubon.org/shade-grown-coffee).

His article also led me to discover that Birds & Beans is available in Nassau County only from our advertiser, Wild Birds Unlimited in Syosset, for $15.99 (four kinds) and $16.99 ("Baltimore Oriole" decaf). They also sell another company's Bird Friendly coffee.

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 Memorial Library from 7:30 to 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. 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:

East Meadow ..... Wilfredo Bellber
Franklin Square ..... Charles Boccio
Long Beach ..... Perry Cohen, Jeanne M. Oleary
Merrick ..... Lauren Fischer
Oceanside ..... Paul Oresky
Plainview ..... Sheila Doherty, Susan Sherer
Rockville Centre .... Thomas Beck

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

THANKS FOR THE DONATIONS!

Michael Sperling

Joe Landesberg asked me to use the *Skimmer* to acknowledge donations to SSAS that have been given to him in recent months, to which I've added ones mailed to our post office box this year that I failed to acknowledge with a letter. If we've left out your name here and/or you need a letter for tax deduction purposes, please e-mail me at mssperling@optonline.net.

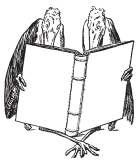
We wish to thank the following people for your extra support of our all-volunteer organization: Leonor Abraido-Fandino, Elizabeth M. Bailey, Dorothea M. & Peter Bruno, John M. & Diane C. Cavanagh, Margarita Fernandez, Linda A. Ferraro, Diana Ihmann, Laura Lopez Weir, Alene and Frank Scoblete, and Paul Stessel.

BOOKS FOR BIRDERS

R. U. Abyrdar II with Sy Schiff

This month's book offers a fresh perspective on birding lore, freely sharing knowledge of ecology, bird behavior, and the critical component of conservation. Yes! I did say, critical! The author does a great job of introducing people to birding and inspiring them to make it an important part of their lives! The book is *Look Up! Birds and Other Natural Wonders Just Outside Your Window* by Woody Wheeler. Sy's important contribution begins here:

The author has been a working member of National Audubon Society, The Nature Conservancy, and Seattle



Parks Foundation. He has also been a tour leader and leads birding trips. So, he has an impressive resume. He has much to say about his interests in education and conservation. In this book, he reminisces about these things that interest him and that he believes should interest his readers. It's done in a series of nature essays.

He wants people to look out and observe their surroundings — not just looking out, but up into the trees and sky; hence the title. The author lives in Washington. It's on the other side of the country from us, and the local color and stories are evident. He manages to also spend time on other parts of the U.S. and has comments regarding the other world places where he visits and also leads trips.

It is difficult to find where to place the book, since it wanders all over the lot. It starts with a plea to get out and examine your surroundings, and then meanders to successes in conservation, then visits to birding spots. The last chapter is titled "The Joy of Birding."

Reading this book is like having a conversation with an interesting friend who talks about what he's been doing and what he likes. It's a bit long on conservation, but that's his thing. The talk wanders all over. Shop by bike, so you get to see your surroundings while traveling. Listen while he describes going for lifers in Costa Rica. Hear a nice discussion on irruptive species from the Arctic.

This is a small book of nature essays that are all about one person's interests in the outdoors. It is an exhortation to get out into it and to get into conserving aspects of it. All and all, nothing outstanding, but a pleasant read.

So, read it for yourselves and ENJOY!!!

31ST ANNUAL WATERFOWL SURVEY

Bill Belford

The waterfowl survey dates for the 2018–2019 season are **Saturdays, December 8, January 12, February 2 & 23,** and **March 23**. Our group visits the various ponds in southern Nassau County from Valley Stream to Massapequa Park. Volunteers can help out for a few hours or the whole day. Call Bill Belford at 385-1759 for more information and/or to volunteer.

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.*

BELLMORE CREEK GRANT

Editor's note: The following is excerpted from an August 8 press release.

New York State Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC) Commissioner Basil Seggos today announced the agency has awarded $375,000 in grants to coastal municipalities and organizations to implement priorities identified in the New York State Ocean Action Plan. The funds will support projects to restore free-flowing waters to benefit water quality, restore aquatic habitat connectivity for Species of Greatest Conservation Need, including the American eel and river herring, and help communities with existing and projected impacts of localized flooding.

Commissioner Seggos said, "These projects will help coastal communities in Westchester County and on Long Island restore local tributaries and improve access for migratory fish such as river herring and American eel. This funding will increase the resiliency of our communities while protecting and preserving New York State's natural resources."

The funding is provided by the State's Environmental Protection Fund (EPF) for Ocean and Great Lakes projects and is administered under DEC's 2018 Division of Marine Resources Marine Habitat Tributary Restoration and Resiliency Grant. The 2018 grant funds will support projects in the South Shore Estuary Reserve and Long Island Sound watershed.

Bellmore Creek Fish Passage Planning, $100,510. Seatuck Environmental Association will develop a shovel-ready design for fish passage for Bellmore Creek's primary, head-of-tide barrier at Nassau County's Mill Pond Park in Wantagh, NY. River herring have been documented in the dam's spillway for the past four migration seasons. Bellmore Creek is one of only two-dozen streams on Long Island where remnant runs of river herring still exist. Access to the 15-acre Mill Pond would provide vital freshwater spawning habitat for river herring.

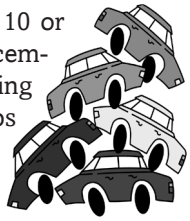
OUR E-LIST http://groups.yahoo.com/group/ssas_list

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.*

DRIVE-THROUGH HOLIDAY LIGHTS AT JONES BEACH'S IMPORTANT BIRD AREA

Michael Sperling

Unfortunately, Jones Beach State Park will yet again be hosting the Magic of Lights show in the West End area this year. SSAS has strongly opposed this show throughout its on-again, off-again history, except when it was briefly relocated to the Jones Beach Theater's parking field. If you're puzzled, go to the West End in the daytime and look at the 40+ displays along more than a mile of the West End's main road, the diagonal wires that prevent them from toppling over, and the electric cables that connect them to a few large portable transformers. Try to visualize the impact of motor vehicles inching through the show every night until 10 or 11 P.M. from November 16 through December 30, dripping toxic fluids and polluting the air as they go. If you see broken bulbs on the ground, other debris, or a dead bird, please send photos. New York should be celebrating the holiday season without commercializing a designated Important Bird Area. The primary sponsors this year include New York Community Bank and Toyota; write to them if you're one of their customers.

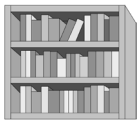


Also, as this newsletter is being completed, we're hearing about Governor Cuomo's proposed $18M Energy and Nature Center for West End 2, accompanied by the declaration of 218.5 acres of the West End as a Park Preservation Area (https://www.governor.ny.gov/news/governor-cuomo-announces-18-million-energy-and-nature-education-center-jones-beach-state-park). We're going to be looking into this, of course.

THE BOOKCASE
The Genius of Birds

Frank Scoblete

Anthropomorphism. Over the centuries that little word (okay, that long word) will cause most of our Western scientists and philosophers to emphatically state that giving human traits to animals is an incorrect assessment of other species' intelligence and their place in the world of thought and behavior. Animals are just instinctual automatons.



After all, if we look at our ancient literature such as the Hebrew Torah, the Christian Old Testament (essentially the Torah along with other scriptures), the New Testament (the story of Jesus), and the Muslim Koran, we see clearly that God is anthropomorphic; he is male, prone to quick and massive bouts of temper, and not averse to killing our first parents (Adam and Eve) for eating a fruit, while sentencing all of their children to die (that means y-o-u) and even at one point drowning the entire world with the exception of the wine-loving Noah, his family, and mated pairs of animals.

Even the ancient Greeks portrayed their gods as humanlike in every way, albeit with more power than mankind — power they used with abandon.

But think of this: What if anthropomorphism may not be such a dirty word or idea after all. Perhaps we should take another look at it, as Jennifer Ackerman clearly and brilliantly relates in her compelling book *The Genius of Birds*.

Using the latest studies, we see birds being creative through immediate and delayed learning, some using complex problem solving to work out puzzles. This includes the Let's Make a Deal or Monty Hall mathematical puzzle that has baffled most humans, although "lowly" pigeons answer this higher math problem without much of a problem. Some birds have an intense interest and recognition of art works, and some seem to have a relatively sophisticated language.

Some songbirds will give a "wee, wee, wee, wee, wee, wee, wee" call to alert others that a large raptor is flying nearby. However, if it is a small raptor, the cry is "wee, wee." At first this might seem the correct weeing as the bigger raptor needs more wees than a small raptor, right? Not so. The large raptors can't really chase these songbirds through the thick leaves and branches of the trees, and thus the long signal is merely a general warning.

But what about the small raptors? They can nail these songbirds because such raptors can maneuver in the trees. So a fast "wee, wee" is what's needed as an immediate warning that a small and deadly raptor might be scouting for his or her next meal. Such songbirds do not want to wait for a long wee because such a wee could be a quick end to them.

Some male birds produce opioid-type drugs when they sing and so they sing like all get-out at certain times of the year even when there aren't many local females to impress. Evidently, being stoned is just as much fun as mating!

Based on our latest knowledge, anthropomorphism is alive and well.

Visit Frank's web site at www.frankscoblete.com. His books are available from smile.amazon.com (including for Kindle), barnesandnoble.com, and in bookstores.

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A CHAPTER OF THE NATIONAL AUDUBON SOCIETY
Americans Committed to Conservation

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Permit No. 1181
NONPROFIT
Freeport, NY

PRINTED ON RECYCLED PAPER

DATED MATERIAL

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