

breeding pairs nesting in every region of the state. These success stories prove that the protections provided by the Endangered Species List can work, which makes it all the more curious why other declining species are not assigned classifications to match their risk. A glaring example of this is the Saltmarsh Sparrow, which is declining at a rate of 9% per year, and whose habitat faces multiple threats from development, mercury contamination, storms, flooding, and sea level rise. We have seen the evidence of these threats at our own Marine Nature Study Area in Oceanside. Extinction is predicted in about 50 years; this warrants a classification of at least threatened.

Other at-risk and declining species remain at the same level of classification. The Golden-winged Warbler remains at special concern despite the DEC's own assessment that "populations in the Northeast have declined severely over the past 40 years" and Breeding Bird Atlas data for New York "show a 53% decline in occupancy from 1980-85 to 2000-05. The Golden-winged Warbler (pictured, © Sue deLearie Adair) is most seriously threatened by competition and hybridization with the Blue-winged Warbler. Reversion and conversion of early successional habitats to more mature forest types and developed habitats are also major threats." Again, the protections of a threatened species are required.



According to Audubon's recently issued Survival by Degrees report (www.audubon.org/climate/survival-bydegrees), 54 New York State bird species are highly vulnerable to extinction from climate change and eleven of these species occur in Nassau County: Eastern Whip-poor-will, Piping Plover, Fish Crow, Wood Thrush, Brown Thrasher, Field Sparrow, Eastern Towhee, Boat-tailed Grackle, Worm-eating Warbler, Pine Warbler, and Scarlet Tanager. The Piping Plover and Boat-tailed Grackle could experience catastrophic habitat loss from sea-level rise. Of the 11 species, currently only the Piping Plover is state listed as endangered and the Eastern Whip-poor-will as special concern. The New York State Endangered Species List will need to accommodate many more birds in the near future.

The proposed new list is available on the DEC website at <https://www.dec.ny.gov/regulations/34113.html>. Comments can be submitted until January 24 by e-mail to: wildliferegs@dec.ny.gov with "Endangered Species List" in the subject line or by mail to: Joe Racette, NYS-DEC, 625 Broadway, Albany, NY 12233-4754. SSAS will be submitting comments and working with our state office, Audubon New York, to compile data in support of greater protections for vulnerable species. If you have concerns about listed or unlisted species, and/or observations or data to support changes in listing, please contact me at brien.weiner@gmail.com or 516-220-7121. To save our birds as our world warms, we must think and act both globally and locally.

As Emily Dickinson observed over a century ago:
*I've heard it in the chillest land —
 And on the strangest Sea —
 Yet — never — in Extremity,
 It asked a crumb — of me.*
 We owe our birds so much more than crumbs.



32ND ANNUAL WATERFOWL SURVEY

Bill Belford

Our waterfowl survey dates for the 2019-2020 season are **Saturdays, December 7, January 11, February 8 & 29, and March 28**. 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.



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SSAS EXHIBITS – VOLUNTEERS NEEDED

Marilyn Hametz

South Shore Audubon has displays in an outdoor kiosk at Hempstead Lake State Park, on the walls during our general meetings, at conferences, and at libraries, and we have wonderful photographers with photos to share. If you would like to help with these or other displays at public locations, please contact me at mwhametz@optonline.net.



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SYSTEM CHANGE, NOT CLIMATE CHANGE!

Jim Brown

On November 4, the Trump administration officially put the U.S. on track to withdraw from the Paris Climate Agreement. Official notice was sent to the United Nations that our nation will no longer remain a signatory to this treaty aimed at lowering greenhouse gas emissions to fight climate change. Under the conditions of the treaty, no nation could officially give notice to leave the agreement for three years and then there would be a one-year waiting period until final withdrawal took effect. The Trump administration gave official notice of its intent on the first day possible, exactly three years following the adoption of the agreement on November 4, 2016. The United States will no longer be a treaty signatory on November 4, 2020. And what are the reasons given for leaving? Our government and its backers believe that policies such as engaging in rigorous lowering of emissions by investing in renewable energy, halting investments in fossil fuel infrastructure, and improving fuel efficiency standards of motor vehicles are bad for America. Fighting climate change in a serious way is thought to lessen our global competitiveness and limit our national economic prosperity. Behind this is either a denial of the reality of climate change or perhaps the cynical view that money is still to be made from fossil fuels, and as the world warms and then burns, a rich nation like ours will surely be able to weather the crisis.

The views of the current national administration are indeed extreme but the views of our prior governments were also far too sanguine regarding our responses to the climate emergency we have been facing for years. The U.N. Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) has warned that the nations of the world must soon, by 2030, make transformative social, economic, and political changes in order to confront climate realities. Not doing so will result in catastrophic warming and a diminished existence for all of us — for the humanity and wildlife that remain. Large areas of the world are on the path to becoming totally unlivable for human beings — islands and coasts are becoming submerged and current desert areas are heating up far beyond survivable temperatures.

Addressing impacts on birds, a recent report by National Audubon, “Survival by Degrees,” predicts that “two-thirds of North American Birds studied — 389 out of 604 species — may face unlivable climate conditions across most of their current ranges by 2080 if global temperatures remain on track to rise by 3°C (5.4°F).” The fight against the ravages of climate chaos requires an international response. A nation such as our own cannot expect that its wealth will protect us from the impacts of a warming planet. The U.S. and industrialized nations of Europe may be able to afford to better mitigate damage than the poorer countries of the Global South. New York City,

for example, may survive with flood gates and seawalls (though worsening the plight of adjoining Long Island, New Jersey, and Connecticut). Countries such as Bangladesh and Indonesia will be hard pressed to do likewise. Already, huge areas of Bangladesh are experiencing catastrophic flooding. Indonesia is planning to move its capital from Jakarta, on the island of Java, to a safer spot on



Borneo. Jakarta, with a population of over 10 million people, is sinking at the rate of almost 7 inches per year, partly due to sea level rise. Climate-change induced drought is a factor causing Central Americans to migrate to the U.S. border from El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras. These climate-vulnerable nations simply do not have the resources to adequately address and mitigate the negative impacts of climate change. The number of “climate refugees” throughout the world will only increase, along with social conflict and even wars, unless, as the IPCC recommends, transformative changes are instituted worldwide.

The technological means to combat climate change are known and the goals of quickly and drastically reducing greenhouse gas emissions and reaching 100% renewable energy utilization are indeed achievable. It is technically possible to transform our energy sources to limit global warming to the 1.5°C (2.7°F) by 2030 specified by the IPCC. What is uncertain is the ability to rapidly transform our social, political, and economic systems — at all levels, from the international to the local — to enable the achievement of that goal.

The power of fossil fuel companies must be drastically curtailed. These powerful corporations seek profits and their behavior is mostly dictated by short-term financial considerations. Planning for a future without fossil fuels and a just transition to renewable energy sources — a transition benefitting displaced workers and communities most harmed by environmental degradation — must be instituted at all levels. Leaving international treaties such as the Paris Climate Agreement is extremely unhelpful. Honoring international treaties on climate should be a required routine, and ongoing and close international cooperation to fight climate change is essential. Another systemic change that is essential is the necessity of transferring wealth from the nations historically responsible for the vast majority of greenhouse gas emissions to the climate-vulnerable Global South. Not only is this an ethical imperative, but if not seriously undertaken, will undoubtedly create untold disruptions and crises that will affect us all. These are big changes, but the planet requires them!

Editor's note: On June 2, 2017 (a day after the Trump administration first announced its intentions), Audubon President and CEO David Yarnold said, “Scrapping the Paris Climate Agreement is an abdication of American leadership in the fight against the biggest threat facing people and birds.”

MILL POND PARK FISH LADDER

One Small Step for a Fish, One Giant Leap for an Ecosystem

Brien Weiner

With development threatening many SSAS bird walk sites — namely Hempstead Lake State Park, Jones Beach State Park, Massapequa Preserve, Jamaica Bay Wildlife Refuge, and Alley Pond Park (see the September *Skimmer*) — it is a pleasure to be able to write about a potentially positive development at another of our sites, Mill Pond Park. The Seatuck Environmental Association received a grant of \$100,500 from the NYS Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC) to develop a shovel-ready design for fish passage for Bellmore Creek’s primary, head-of-tide barrier at Mill Pond Park, thereby improving the ecosystem and habitat for both fish and birds. The steering committee for the project includes SSAS as well as other environmental organizations, civic groups, and DEC and Town of Hempstead conservation staff.

Throughout the Long Island estuary, fish ladders are enabling native diadromous fish (fish that divide their life cycles between fresh water and salt water), such as river herring (alewife and blueback herring) and American eel (pictured), to repopulate our streams. Their populations declined as dams and culverts for residential and commercial development impeded their migration. The decline of these fish as forage for other species reverberates along the entire food chain. With the aid of fish ladders, we can restore healthy ecosystems to estuarine, freshwater, and upland habitats. 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.

Ideally, dam removal is the preferred method of reconnecting tributaries because it allows not only greater access for fish, but also transport of sediment downstream so that salt marshes can keep up with sea level rise. Many dams no longer serve their original purpose and require costly maintenance. Dams create the conditions under which debris accumulates and invasive aquatic vegetation thrives, both of which become costly to remove, as is the case at Mill Pond. The possibility of removing the Mill Pond dam will be explored as part of Seatuck’s project. When dams are removed, wetlands form rapidly and serve to mitigate flooding. Mill Pond provides valuable habitat for wintering waterfowl, and there is a growing movement that recognizes the necessity of wildlife corridors if species are to survive. Given limited space, however, Mill Pond Park is a good candidate for a fish ladder; river herring were discovered in Bellmore Creek in 2015 and 408 were counted in 2019, but estimates reach 1000.

Fish ladders generally fall into three categories. Pool-and-weir fish ladders feature a series of pools separated by

overflow weirs that break the total flow of the impoundment into discrete passable increments. Baffle-based fish ladders use baffles to dissipate the speed of water flowing through a flume to create a low-velocity zone of passage for migratory fish; an example is the fishway at Massapequa Lake. Nature-like fish ladders mimic natural streams, using boulders, cobble, and other natural materials to create appropriate hydraulic conditions for multiple species, including fish; they require more space than is available at Mill Pond Park.



As for the birds, Ospreys return to Long Island as river herring move into the estuary and streams. Herons and egrets congregate around fish ladders, sometimes to the point that ladders need to be covered with nets so that the birds do not pick off all the fish. The addition of a fish ladder to Mill Pond Park should provide SSAS with productive bird walks and opportunities to engage community scientists and local students in surveys and stewardship. For more information, see https://www.seatuck.org/images/PDF/Seatuck_RestorationStrategy_v12.pdf.

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.*

DRIVE-THROUGH HOLIDAY LIGHTS AT JONES BEACH

Mike Spelling

Jones Beach State Park’s West End, unfortunately, will yet again be used for a “Magic of Lights” show. SSAS has strongly opposed the light shows throughout their on-again, off-again history, except when it was briefly relocated to the Jones Beach Theater’s parking field. If you’re wondering why, go to the West End in the daytime and look at the dozens of tall 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 big transformers. Try to picture motor vehicles inching through the show every night from 5 P.M. until 10 or 11 P.M. for 44 days, 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 us photos. New York should be celebrating the holiday season without commercializing a designated Important Bird Area. The primary sponsors are New York Community Bank, Toyota, and OK Petroleum; write to them if you’re one of their customers.



